

JUDAISM

MORDECAI M. KAPLAN

On His Hundredth Year

The Man — His Thought — His Influence

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THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

Jenny Machlowitz Klein

AN INTERVIEW WITH WALTER KAUFMANN

Trude Weiss-Rosmarin

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JUDAISM

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ROBERT GORDIS

Managing Editor

RUTH B. WAXMAN

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

In increasing measure, modern men are turning again to the quest for a worldview on the issues that are timeless—the meaning of life, the challenge of death, the purpose of suffering, the significance of the individual, his relation to society, and the goal of history. In order to advance this enterprise of spiritual discovery of our time this journal has been projected. It will be primarily concerned with the philosophy, ethics, and religion of Judaism as a factor in the contemporary world . . .

We are committed to the proposition that Judaism has positive value today for Jews and for the world . . . At the same time, we disassociate ourselves from the dangerous tendency toward the hardening of party lines on the contemporary Jewish scene . . . The members of the Board of Editors belong to every school of Jewish life or to none. The trends popularly referred to as Orthodox, Conservatism, Reform, Reconstructionism, as well as others that as yet have no specific names, have their advocates among us, though no institution or movement is officially represented . . . Undoubtedly, our differences will find expression in these pages, but we shall be at one in opposing the dogmatism which takes for granted that one's own particular standpoint has a monopoly on truth and the authoritarianism which would suppress any contrary point of view.

Judaism will be dedicated to the quest for truth in the spirit of freedom. Our columns will be open to anyone who has something significant to say and the ability to say it well. New and unconventional interpretations, whatever their standpoint, will be welcomed from every source, for we share the conviction of the Talmud that "Both these and the others are the words of the living God." *From the introductory article by Robert Gordis, "Toward a Renaissance of Judaism" in Vol. I, No. 1.*

The First Reader

Celebrating a Centennial

The motive for dedicating the bulk of our current issue to the life, work and thought of Mordecai M. Kaplan is self-evident. The length of days with which this sage and teacher in Israel has been blessed is infinitely less important than the significance, range and impact of his career upon Judaism and the Jewish people.

He has contributed richly to the treasure house of Jewish religious thought and added new dimensions to Jewish theology. He has left his stamp on the religious practice, both individual and collective, of the American Jewish community. He has stimulated the self-perception of modern Jews, and helped them to understand their relationship to one another, to their indigenous communities, to Israel and to world Jewry.

Even his sharpest opponents will concede that he has helped to clarify and sharpen the thinking of modern Jews, when the natural tendency was to obfuscate and equivocate. Whatever are the attributes that Kaplan may assign to God, truth remains the seal of the Holy One, blessed be He.

We are grateful to the distinguished contributors who, from varying perspectives, have joined in this tribute to Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan on his hundredth year.

Both Worlds Are Good

One of the basic themes in the thought of Mordecai Kaplan is his insistence that the modern Jew must live in two civilizations. A Jew in America must be integrated into America life and share the highest values of its culture and, at the same, time be rooted in the Jewish tradition and live by its noblest teachings. No one — and certainly not Kaplan — has suggested that it is easy to affect this synthesis. In recent years, with the rising crest of chauvinist ethnicity, the idea has been derided and scorned and declared to be a total impossibility.

The truth is, however, that willy-nilly the overwhelming majority of American Jews do precisely this — they live both as Americans and as Jews. The tragedy all too often is that the elements of both civilizations which they incorporate into their lifestyle are generally superficial, sometimes vulgar and frequently meaningless. Nonetheless, living in both civilizations on a high level is a possibility and a reality for many American Jews who have had the benefit of a fine education in both spheres.

A case in point is afforded by *Jennie Machlowitz Klein* in her affectionate reminiscences of the group of gifted and dedicated Jewish teachers

who molded her personality. In "The Best of Both Worlds," she does not discuss the theory of living in two civilizations; she exults in the reality as she has experienced it in her own person and in her family.

Who, Really, Are the Zionists?

Is Zionism the fulfillment of the age-old traditional Jewish yearning for the Messianic redemption and the restoration of Israel to the Holy Land, or does it represent a radical break with the Jewish tradition because of its secular and political character? The issue has been debated for decades and protagonists on both sides have not been lacking.

In his paper, "Modern Zionism — an Historic Perspective," *Samuel Schafner* argues that it represents an event of radical discontinuity in Jewish history, owing little to the Jewish religion and, indeed, being strongly opposed by authoritative religious spokesmen and leaders.

As the reader ponders these two opposing assessments of the relationship of Zionism to Judaism, he may come to the conclusion that both positions are right and wrong, if only because neither Judaism nor Zionism is monolithic and there are strands in each that harmonize with elements in the other. The author himself is not unaware of these complexities when he notes the differences between East European and West European Zionism, as well as the distinctions between Sephardic and Ashkenazic Judaism. It cannot be gainsaid, however, that the fundamental disparity between traditional Judaism and the Zionist movement continues to play an important role in the constellation of political and social groupings both within Israel and in the Diaspora.

A Philosopher Speaks

One of the most creative figures in contemporary life and thought, all the more remarkable because of his own personal history, was the Princeton professor of philosophy and distinguished scholar, Walter Kaufmann. His wide-ranging interests and his vigorous espousal of strikingly individual standpoints, coupled with unflagging creativity and high gifts of expression, made him one of the most widely read thinkers of our age.

The esteemed editor of our contemporary journal, *The Jewish Spectator*, Dr. Trude Weiss-Rosmarin, has conducted "An Interview with Walter Kaufmann," which deals with many of the practical and theoretic concerns of Jewish life today.

R.G.

Mordecai Kaplan – The Man and The Movement

ROBERT GORDIS

EVER SINCE BOYHOOD, I HAVE BEEN INTRIGUED by a passage in the Talmud (*Baba Mezia* 84a). It is concerned with the relationship of two great Palestinian sages of the third century, Rabbi Johanan bar Nappaha, who was, first in Sepphoris and then in Tiberias, the head of the academy, and his colleague, Resh Lakish, who frequently engaged in controversy with him. The passage always seemed to me to embody some of the most precious attributes of the Jewish tradition — a deep respect for difference of opinion, a high regard for the freedom of the human personality and an unceasing quest for the truth, without fear or favor. The passage reads as follows:

When Resh Lakish died, Rabbi Johanan was inconsolable. His colleagues sent Rabbi Eleazar ben Pedat, who was famous for his sharp mind, to sit in the academy before him. Whenever Rabbi Johanan would make a statement, Rabbi Eleazar would say, "I have a text to support your view." Thereupon Rabbi Johanan responded, "Are you like Resh Lakish? Whenever I used to make a statement, Resh Lakish raised twenty-four objections and I would offer twenty-four responses, and thus the boundaries of Torah were extended. But all you can say is, 'I have a text to support you.' Don't I know that my point is well taken?" Then Rabbi Johanan tore his garments and wept, saying, "Where are you, Resh Lakish? Where are you, Resh Lakish?" until he went out of his mind. The sages besought God's mercy upon him and Rabbi Johanan passed away.

Seventeen centuries later, Albert Einstein was asked what values he found in the Jewish tradition. Einstein obviously was unaware of the Talmudic sage, yet he bore testimony to the same basic qualities of the tradition which he expressed in more sophisticated form:

The striving after knowledge for its own sake, the love of justice verging on fanaticism, and the quest for personal independence — these are the motivating traditions of the Jewish people which cause me to regard my adherence thereto as a gift of destiny.

The one hundredth birthday of Mordecai Kaplan comes on June 11, 1981. To mark this extraordinary occasion, we are dedicating this issue of JUDAISM in honor of this great thinker, lover of his people and exemplar of its highest ideals. Mordecai M. Kaplan stands in the same line as Rabbi Johanan and Albert Einstein. He is as passionately committed to his ideas as were the ancient rabbi and the modern scientist. Kaplan has always striven to win adherents for his views, but, like them, he has honored even more freedom of thought, independence of judgment and love of truth. It is this spirit that animates our Kaplan Centennial Issue. It does not

present a collection of encomia on Kaplan, eminently deserved as they are and undoubtedly forthcoming from many quarters as they will be. Rather, we have conceived of our function as being to offer an affectionate tribute to the man, a fair-minded and independent evaluation of his thought, and a balanced assessment of his influence upon twentieth-century Judaism.

Many associates and students of Dr. Kaplan were impressed by what they perceived to be his dogmatic insistence upon his own views and his unbending adherence to positions he had articulated. Yet, I must confess that, while he was naturally dedicated to his own ideas, I found him open-minded and hospitable to views differing from his own. This held true throughout my relationship with him, which began during my student years at the Seminary and continued during my service on its faculty.

When the first issue of *The Reconstructionist* magazine appeared, it contained a statement of principles that began with the declaration, "Judaism is a civilization," and then proceeded to indicate its various components. The wording was, of course, virtually identical with the title of Dr. Kaplan's first book, *Judaism as a Civilization*.

Shortly after the magazine appeared, I met Dr. Kaplan and ventured to say to him, "Isn't it true that the various facets that enter into Jewish civilization, such as music, art or even literature, are not all equal in importance? Will you not agree that, of all the elements in Judaism, religion is the most central and pervasive? If this is true, I believe that the phrase 'Judaism is a civilization' should be modified to read 'Judaism is a religious civilization'." Dr. Kaplan listened to my comment, remained silent, and thanked me. Shortly thereafter, the adjective was added in the now familiar formulation "Judaism is a religious civilization."

Mordecai Kaplan is undoubtedly the most influential philosopher of Judaism on this continent and one of the seminal minds in twentieth-century Jewry. His career would be highly significant on any one of several counts. As a teacher of generations of rabbis, educators and Jewish social workers, he has been a major builder of contemporary Jewish life. It is not without significance that he innovated such institutions as "the Jewish Center" and "Bat Mitzvah," which are now staples in Jewish experience both in America and abroad. His formulation of the concept of "Jewish peoplehood" is all but universally accepted today. The terms as well as their content are Kaplan's creation. The driving force behind his life-long activity has been his passionate concern with the preservation of the Jewish people and the survival of Judaism, not only for its own sake but as a precious strand in the pattern of the life and faith of humankind. Like the Biblical prophets, Kaplan never found a conflict between his attachment to his own people and his loyalty to the world community. For him, as for them, particularism and universalism are not competitive but complementary, and the tension between them deepens and enriches them both.

For many decades, Kaplan was a powerful influence on the lead-

ership of Conservative, Reform and even secular Judaism, and his influence in all three schools of thought is strongly felt to the present day. He has exerted great influence upon the Jewish laity, not only by founding a congregation in his own image, the Society for the Advancement of Judaism in New York City, but even more by his enunciation of the philosophy of Reconstructionism. In his first great book, *Judaism as a Civilization*, and in the many papers and volumes that followed, he won a wide hearing and substantial support for his ideas. Originally, he was content to have Reconstructionism serve as a pervasive influence on other movements without taking on an organizational structure of its own. About two decades ago, Reconstructionism emerged as a "Fourth Philosophy," to borrow a term from Josephus, and became an independent religious group seeking to win a place by the side of Orthodoxy, Conservatism and Reform.

Here a striking paradox emerges. On the one hand, it has been observed that American Jews today are overwhelmingly Reconstructionist in outlook. On the other hand, the official movement is still limited in its organizational strength, as reflected in the number of its rabbis and its affiliated congregations. The explanation of the paradox is to be sought in the area of semantics. It has not been observed with sufficient clarity that Reconstructionism is a term with two basic connotations. One belongs to the field of sociology, the other to the area of theology. The two usages need to be clearly demarcated, for they are virtually independent of one another.

In the first instance, Reconstructionism is a sociological theory regarding the nature of the Jewish group, to whom it applies the concept of peoplehood. The Jewish people embodies in itself an organic interrelationship involving ethnicity, culture and religion, with the land of Israel as its spiritual center and the Diaspora serving as the periphery of the circle. In this area, Dr. Kaplan has, in effect, presented a modern reinterpretation of the classic statement of the Zohar, "God, Israel and the Torah are one." He has demonstrated that people, culture and faith are interwoven, with each element sustaining and, in turn, drawing sustenance from the others. The vast majority of modern Jews — Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and even many secularists and unaffiliated ones — adhere to this view of the nature of the Jewish people. In this sense, they are all Reconstructionists.

The term, however, is also applied more narrowly to a body of specific theological doctrine, which was enunciated in all its essentials by Mordecai Kaplan and a few close disciples. As a theological system, Reconstructionism presents a radical reinterpretation of the three major foci of the Jewish tradition — God, Israel and Torah.

Reconstructionist theology conceives of God not as a Person but as a Process making for good in the universe. Moreover, Reconstructionism is hospitable to man and guarantees the ultimate triumph of justice, freedom and peace. The Reconstructionist doctrine was originally advanced

on the ground that faith in a personal God possessing existential reality — no matter how the term “personal” be understood — is difficult, if not impossible, for modern men and women, whose outlook has been shaped by the scientific method. This contention has been countered by the argument that to believe that the world is hospitable to man’s highest aspirations, which is basic to the Reconstructionist “reinterpretation” of the God-idea, also demands an act of faith. Such a conviction is not easier and, perhaps, it is even harder to achieve, than the traditional theistic position, that there is a God of righteousness governing the universe.

With regard to Israel, Reconstructionism rejects the doctrine of the Chosen People on pragmatic as well as theoretic grounds. It denies any special role for the people of Israel in God’s cosmic plan. No people is “chosen” or all are. It argues that the claim for the election of Israel breeds an unwarranted sense of superiority among Jews and evokes an undesirable attitude of hostility from Gentiles. Undoubtedly the idea of the Chosen People has frequently been vulgarized and has probably stimulated anti-Jewish sentiment in many quarters. But, it has been argued, the doctrine of the election of Israel deserves to be understood as it was enunciated by the Prophets of Israel and embodied in the highest levels of the Jewish tradition. Thus it is clearly free of the moral stigma of chauvinism, smug superiority, and isolation from the body politic of mankind. On the contrary, “a kingdom of priests,” the phrase that the Torah applies to the Jewish people, clearly implies a “laity” to whom the priest ministers. The prophet who sees the people of Israel as the servant of the Lord, whom the great prophet of the exile describes as the witness to God’s cause and His messenger to the world, is obviously not isolated from humanity. In addition, it has been claimed that the doctrine of the Chosen People is defensible on objective, historical grounds as well, when the record of Jewish achievements, both collective and individual, is surveyed.

As for Torah, the third member of the triad, Reconstructionism radically transforms the concept of Torah from the level of Divine revelation, however conceived, to the purely human plane. It sees Torah as the national literature of the Jewish people, expressing Israel’s aspiration toward God. Hence the ritual observances of Judaism are to be regarded not as *mizvot*, Divine commandments, but as folkways of the Jewish people. Kaplan himself has always scrupulously observed the traditional lifestyle — but it is undeniable that his philosophy permits substantial easing of “the yoke of the Commandments” and sanctions freedom to depart from the body of Jewish law. Thus, many Reform rabbis and secularists who regard themselves as Reconstructionists do not feel impelled to observe the Sabbath and *kashrut* even in the modified forms advocated in the *Reconstructionist Guide to Ritual Usage*.

Clearly, these major aspects of Kaplan’s theology have been highly controversial, and I myself have been unable to accept his reinterpretation of the three elements in this triad of God, Israel and Torah. But

though the number of adherents of Reconstructionism in its theological aspect is substantially limited, Kaplan's influence has been far more pervasive than the number of his disciples. Even those who are unable to accept his approach have been challenged by his views to examine their own presuppositions and have been forced to clarify and deepen their own understanding of the principles they profess. In this basic sense, Kaplan's thought has led to the enrichment of the content of all philosophies of Judaism in our age.

Even this cursory review of the basic elements of Dr. Kaplan's thought suggests the debt he owes to the prophets, the sages and the thinkers of Israel on the one hand and to such disparate modern figures as Aḥad Ha'am, Emile Durkheim, John Dewey and Henry N. Wieman on the other, a debt which he has freely acknowledged. Kaplan's rare openness of mind impelled him to incorporate ideas and insights that he derived from his wide reading in many fields. In a mixture of reverence and raillery, some of his students at the Seminary were wont to say, "What Kaplan reads on Monday becomes part of Reconstructionism on Wednesday."

The English writer and artist, Max Beerbohm, once drew a cartoon showing a second-hand clothes-dealer examining a suit of clothes which George Bernard Shaw was offering for sale. "But Mr. Shaw, look at this suit. The pants are Nietzsche's. The vest is Darwin's. The jacket is Ibsen's." "Yes," replied Shaw, "but look at the patches." Much more than patches is involved here. It may be true that one or another element in Kaplan's world-view was expressed with more or less clarity and prescience before. But even when this can be demonstrated — and the search for precedents and parallels in many areas of scholarship has produced a disease called parallelomania — it does not diminish the greatness of his achievement. It is the shaping that he gave to each aspect and, above all, his synthesizing of the elements into a coherent pattern, as well as the vigor and clarity with which they have been propounded, that constitute the Torah of Mordecai M. Kaplan. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Assessing the contribution of any thinker, however original and even seminal he may have been, is by its very nature a subtle and ambiguous task. Only God, the philosophers tell us, has the capacity of *creatio ex nihilo*, of creating the new out of nothing. Human beings always must fashion the new out of what already exists. No human being is an island unto himself and no thinker lives in a vacuum.

Moreover, Mordecai M. Kaplan is greater than all his achievements, because his life has been distinguished by a quality that has never been common and today is in exceedingly short supply — an extraordinary integrity of spirit, both intellectual and moral. His intellectual integrity has made his long career an ongoing quest for truth, though it has exposed him to criticism and even denigration. His moral integrity has imbued him with a profound love for his people and his fellow men, so that he has never played politics or yielded to expediency. As a disciple of

the prophets and sages of Israel, he has been sensitive to oppression and falsehood and unflinching in his allegiance to social justice, international understanding and world peace as basic elements in his Judaism. Though he would naturally wish to augment the number of his followers, Kaplan would include all who labor to enhance the preservation of the Jewish people and the meaningful survival of its tradition as members of a Society for the Advancement of Judaism *shel ma'alah*.

In projecting this Kaplan Centennial Issue, we have set before us several goals that we believe would surely be close to Dr. Kaplan's heart. In the First Section, "The Man," our collaborators have sought to capture something of his personality, particularly its more private aspects as expressed in his relationship to his family and to several generations of students. In the Second Section, "His Thought," the writers have striven to highlight his major contributions to religious thought and to bring them to the attention of many who might otherwise not be aware of them. In the Third Section, "His Influence," the contributors have sought to indicate the impact of his life and work on modern Jewish religious movements such as Reform, Conservatism and Reconstructionism, as well as his role in the philosophy of such major communal activities as Jewish education and the center movement.

This journal has always offered a free platform for the expression of all views and a forum for the cross-fertilization of differing positions. We, therefore, have extended to our contributors the opportunity for a free and frank evaluation of the life, thought and work of Mordecai M. Kaplan. Availing themselves of this invitation, they have not hesitated to present careful critiques of his thought while paying tribute to the man and his work. This I regard as the highest homage to *rabban shel Yisrael*, Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan.

On the blessed occasion of his one hundredth year, we send, our heartfelt greetings. In the words of the Psalms (128:6, 7):

May the Lord bless you out of Zion,
and may you see the well-being of Jerusalem
all the days of your life.
May you see children to your children
and peace upon Israel.

My Father, Mordecai

JUDITH K. EISENSTEIN

IN THESE PSYCHO-ANALYTICALLY INFLUENCED times it is very difficult for a daughter to write about her father, even if the daughter has passed the three-score-and-ten mark, and her father is into his hundredth year. Such a story, for public consumption, ought to be a bitter-sweet nostalgic set of anecdotes, which would imply: "You all knew him as the stern, demanding, iconoclastic teacher, the non-compromising seeker after truth, intolerant of the weaknesses of superstition and sentimentality, and of any cover-up of illogic and faulty thinking. But, ah, we knew him as the gentle loving papa, doted on by all his female family, petted and cajoled, full of fun and foibles."

Such an account of life with my father would be sorely out of focus. Equally out of focus would be a personal revelation, as on the analyst's couch, of a long struggle with one's Oedipal relationship, inevitable in the life of any daughter of any father. Not only the ordinary distortions of such a view would result. Such an account would also vitiate, to a great extent, the singularity of the experience of having Mordecai Kaplan for a father. He was always overwhelming. His students and disciples, his friends and supporters, his colleagues in the Reconstructionist movement were all like his children in feeling this way. But they could "take him or leave him." We, his family, had to deal with this fact, sometimes to resist it, while continuing to love him and to cooperate with him. Essentially, he has been the same person at home and abroad, except that we have had, in addition, his intense love: love strong enough to nourish our need to grow and to be ourselves, love which expanded as we grew older, to embrace each of our husbands as well.

Naturally, each of the four of us sisters perceived that love in a different way. Certain aspects we shared. We were all aware that the love between father and mother was the supreme moving force of our household, coming far above their feelings for us, but we never felt excluded. As little girls we experienced the rough big-bearish hugs, the funny finger games he devised, the occasional spontaneous gifts he brought — a toy that tickled his fancy, or, when we finally achieved a Victrola, the utterly silly records with which he would regale us: "Good Morning Mr. Zip Zip Zip!" and, worse yet, those Yiddish-accented monologues, "Cohen on the Telephone." As adolescents we recognized as love his careful scrutiny of our appearance, his insistence on the right colors, the right hairdo, proper posture and correct walking. As adults, I recall our asking him, one

JUDITH K. EISENSTEIN *is at present teaching at The Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, Philadelphia, Pa.*

mellow Friday evening, whether he never really minded having four daughters and no sons. He replied forthwith, "If it happened all over again, I'd name you Gilah, Rinah, Dizah and Hedvah!"

Nevertheless, we were always subjected to the same standards, ethical and intellectual, as were any of his students. How deeply we have internalized those standards (whether or not we have lived up to them) has been brought to mind in more recent days. When my little grandson was proudly pointing to his toys and enunciating his claim, "Mine!" I felt a slight shock. That word was as taboo in our childhood as "shut up" or "ain't." I have sometimes been handicapped in adult situations by a total inability to face anyone and to say, "You lie!" To accuse anyone of lying was the worst possible insult, just as to lie was the worst possible misdeed. Only days before this writing, wandering into the lovely garden of the new American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, I was stopped short by the sight of a sculpture which has surely been disinterred from the depths of storage. I stooped to read the identification ("Struggle of the Two Natures of Man," George Gray Barnard) and from the depths of my own subconscious rose the vivid picture of father, on one of our frequent visits to the museum, pointing out to me that this was the struggle of the *Yezer ha-Tov* with the *Yezer ha-Ra*, and that if we want to, and try hard enough, the *Yezer ha-Tov* would surely stand triumphant as in this sculpture. (At this viewing I couldn't be sure which was the victor. The struggling youths looked almost identical!)

These "lessons" in ethics were closely interwoven with other teaching. Father was either teaching or providing us with the finest teachers he could find: Hebrew and French, German and music, and books, books, books. Not for me the easy way of girls' books. When I was six, father gave me Montefiore's *Bible for Home Reading* and Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare*. It was Dickens and Scott and George Eliot. (Luckily for me, Louisa Alcott was tolerated, because she had been a friend of Emerson.) Later came the theater. Father and mother were avid goers, and they soon included me in their subscriptions to the Theater Guild and the Neighborhood Playhouse down on Grand Street. Father loved to show me the first house that he had lived in when he came to this country as a child, and which was still standing at the time that that earliest of Off-Broadway theaters was flourishing. The crowning event of the visits to the uptown theaters was the ice-cream soda at Schrafft's. But the discussions which followed each play lasted over into days — Shaw, and Ibsen, and O'Neill, and Capek — what food for teaching they were! Alas, there was no Hebrew theater in those early decades of the century. By the time the Habimah Theater made its first American visit, I was old enough to attend with my peers. But father had given me Bialik's translation of Ansky's *The Dibbuk* to read, and had taken me to see the Yiddish Art Theater production of Asch's *Shabsai Tzvi*.

In addition, we were constantly exposed to interesting and creative personalities who came and went across our threshold. A list of them

would be an atrocious example of name dropping. Still, let me mention only some of those who had a direct influence on my own growth and interests, who actually talked to me, and listened to me: Abraham Z. Idelsohn, pioneer historian of the music of the Jews, whom father had persuaded to serve as cantor in the young Society for the Advancement of Judaism for a brief period before he was appointed to a professorship at Hebrew Union College; then, a frequent visitor to our home, especially when he was using father as a model, the brilliant and eccentric sculptor Enrico Glicenstein — the only one I ever knew to outshout father — but who made us all aware of art values that we should never have learned in school, and in particular of the art potential of the Bible; another frequent visitor, Irma Lindheim, whose total devotion to a Utopian Zionism, coupled with beauty, glamor and imagination, was particularly fascinating to any young person who met her. There were many others, but space does not permit their inclusion here; people who were, for a time, *benei bayit*, who came to see father, but remained to be regaled by mother with tea and cookies and a meal or two, and who sometimes impelled us to follow in their footsteps.

However, father's way of teaching us, his children, was not only to "put in," but to draw out. In addition to his insistence that we tell back in our own words any story that we read, any play that we saw, and, later, to summarize his own sermons, he made a special point of persuading us to ask questions. "If you don't know, if you don't understand, be sure to ask!" And we did. As the years went by he had to cope with all of our toughest questions: "How can we believe in God?" "Why do we need to be Jewish?" "Why do we pray, to whom do we pray?" "Why must we go to the synagogue to pray?" "Why do we need to observe the numerous *mizvot*?" Painstakingly and patiently, and over and over again, to respond to our different age levels, he answered our questions. And sometimes, indeed, he revised his answers, in recognition of the validity of the questions. "Why can't we have music on the *Shabbat*?" and he said, "We shall have music on the *Shabbat*." "Why do we sing the title, when we sing *Shir ha-ma'alot*?" "Right," said father, "we will begin with the words *be-shuv Adonai*."

But the rock-bottom to all questions was "Love and loyalty." Oh, yes, there were reasons for everything. We were taught to be logical and knowledgeable, but about love and loyalty there was no more reasoning. Those were axiomatic. Equally axiomatic was the possibility to choose between the *Yezer ha-Tov* and the *Yezer ha-Ra* by our own will.

For father has always been a great believer in the power of the will. Willpower could make you stop biting your nails, practice scales, lose weight, speak Hebrew, write books, and behave decently to others. Of course, there was that troublesome subconscious. But it, too, could be dealt with by strength of will. In addition, father has been a believer in the power of the word. You had to use words carefully, know their precise meaning, never use a word or utter a sentence that you didn't mean, or

believe in. This rule, of course, extended to words used in worship. Father never spoke them mechanically and I, for one, learned to make quick translations in my mind from words in the liturgy to interpretations which had come to me in some of those question-answer sessions.

All of this did not make for an easy and complacent family existence. It made us different, and that is never comfortable. We were different in many ways from other families in our environment. Father worked at home a great deal of the time, and that alone made our home different. Also, he did have a way of intimidating our young friends — and, even later, our not-so-young friends. The questioning and challenging which father asked for sometimes made our mealtimes less than peaceful, and all the patience in the world would occasionally give out, and tempers would rise to a high pitch. Father could hurl lightning and thunderbolts, mother added some of her own (usually in his defense) and all four of us could lend our share to the general din, but we always cleared the air. I have no memory of hung-over resentments and grudges, and only of an ultimate resolution of each disagreement. This could have happened only because of father's deep devotion to the democratic ideal, and to that unwavering honesty which would not permit him to avow an ideal and behave in contradiction to it. It must have been very hard on him, every so often, to permit us to go our own way. He could, indeed, be dreadfully angry. But he could also listen and understand, and send us on our different ways with his blessing.

My Teacher: A Reminiscence

MAX J. ROUTTENBERG

IN THE FALL OF 1927, WHEN I ENROLLED AS a student at Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Yeshiva, the exodus to the Seminary had already begun. It was not a mass exodus, just a trickle, but it included some of the most promising students at the Yeshiva. In the course of time I learned why they had left. Their reasons were identical with those that compelled me to leave at the end of my first year.

At the Yeshiva, the story was that these renegades had sold their souls for a mess of pottage; that the financial rewards in store for a Conservative rabbi were much greater than could be achieved by an Orthodox rabbi. Mostly, however, the talk was about the seductive appeal of Schechter's Seminary where observance of the *mizvot* was disregarded and basic Jewish beliefs discarded. And there at the Seminary was the arch *apikoros* of the day, Mordecai M. Kaplan.

Since those of us who left the Yeshiva knew virtually nothing about Kaplan, we certainly did not go to the Seminary out of *ahavat Mordecai*. Neither were we prompted by any *sin'ah* for the institution or for any individual teachers whom we had forsaken. We were all beneficiaries of the intense Talmudic studies we had undergone at the Yeshiva and would forever remain in its debt.

It was really very simple and ordinary, albeit painful. We were emerging from late adolescence into early manhood and, among other growing problems, we experienced a crisis of faith. Our secular university studies — philosophy, history, the physical and life sciences — undermined many of our cherished beliefs and we found ourselves adrift, moving rapidly away intellectually and religiously from our traditional moorings. We desperately needed answers to questions that were troubling us. It was clear that the Yeshiva was not the milieu in which those problems could be resolved. From what we had learned about the faculty and the curriculum at the Seminary, we had the hopeful feeling that we would find there a more congenial and, intellectually, a more hospitable home than the one we were leaving.

At the Yeshiva, some of the teachers spoke occasionally with grudging respect about certain Seminary professors. These included the Talmud scholar, Louis Ginzberg, the historian, Alexander Marx, and the leading authority in medieval Hebrew, Israel Davidson. I looked forward with great eagerness to studying under them, but it was the man who was so bitterly maligned and reviled in Orthodox circles who aroused my greatest curiosity and I could hardly wait to sit in his class.

MAX J. ROUTTENBERG is *rabbi emeritus*, Temple B'nai Sholom, Rockville Centre, N.Y., and *past president* of The Rabbinical Assembly.

My first encounter with Professor Kaplan was a near-disaster. It took place during my second week at the Seminary. In my first class with him I sat staring, fascinated and hypnotized, and uttered neither a word nor a sound. Kaplan was not yet fifty at the time, a handsome man in the full power and vigor of his manhood. His manner and bearing were regal and commanded undivided attention. I was struck by his total absorption in the subject he was teaching. He concentrated on every word; the slightest distraction in the classroom irritated him. I could see the angry glare in his eyes through his rimless glasses as he frowned at a student who had stooped to pick up an errant sheet of paper from the floor.

Second week. We were studying Midrash *Shir Hashirim Rabbah* and I was sharing a text with a fellow Montrealer. I tried to concentrate on the lesson but my *landsman* had a joke to tell me. We were seated in the rear of the room behind two tall students and Kaplan could neither see nor hear us. Besides, he was concentrating deeply on explaining the Midrash. "You must understand," he spoke with intensity, "the rabbis are saying something very important here. I mean . . . you see . . . I mean they are actually giving us an apotheosization of the people Israel . . ."

Precisely at this moment, my friend was giving the punch line of his story and involuntarily I emitted a chuckle. Kaplan looked up startled. He peered in the general direction from which the sound had come. "Who laughed?" he wanted to know. His tone and manner were menacing. Since fellow students were staring at me, I had no alternative but to raise my hand. "Stand up," he thundered, "what's your name?" I rose trembling and gave my name. "You laughed at what I was saying," he stated as a fact. I started to explain but he would not listen. "I must assume you did not understand what I was saying." A sudden thought struck him. "Will you explain to the class what I meant by 'the apotheosization of the people Israel?'" I have the feeling to this day that if I had not known what the phrase meant my career as a Seminary student would have ended there and then. After I gave the proper explanation, Kaplan glared at me and ordered me to be seated. I was shaken by the experience but I learned a great deal about my teacher that day — as well as at the end of the term when I received a grade of D- for the course in Midrash.

Aside from learning that Kaplan could brook no disturbance in class, it became clear, as time went on, that we had a teacher with a great obsession. It did not endear him to his students. It rendered him austere and aloof. His outer pose was severe and his mood always serious. He was an impatient, irritable man. As students are wont, I sometimes day-dreamed about becoming friendly with Kaplan, walking him home, having long, intimate chats, sharing confidences, being invited for tea or dinner to his home, meeting the members of his family (I heard he had four pretty daughters). It was sheer fantasy, self-delusion. Kaplan would never become my confidant, my friend. The relationship would always be that of teacher and student.

Today, looking back from the perspective of half a century, I ask

myself, why do I have such admiration, even genuine affection for this man? I am still filled with a profound sense of gratitude when I think of him — and I think of him often because I can rarely escape his pervasive influence. What a privilege it was to sit at the feet of this man during his most creative and productive years!

Here was a teacher who was passionately in love with Judaism and with the Jewish people, and that love seized us like a contagion. We trembled with him as he pictured the whole Jewish structure collapsing and the Jewish people disappearing. We marvelled at the suppleness of his intellect and rejoiced as he blueprinted the reconstruction of the Jewish edifice and indicated how Judaism could be saved. We did not realize it at the time, but we were living through the conception, the gestation and the birth of the idea that inflamed our teacher — Judaism as a civilization — as it developed and unfolded in the classroom, in the *Menorah Journal*, in the *S.A.J. Review*. And we were not simply spectators, we were active participants!

We never questioned Kaplan's dedication and commitment. We never questioned the sincerity of his religious fervor and piety. We saw a man obsessed with an idea that was a burning fire in his innermost parts. Such a teacher could not become "one of the boys," a pal to his students. As far as we could tell, Kaplan had no "lighter" moments. There was no time for banter, for idle chatter. There was even the question whether there was any humor in the man. There were those who charged that he was a completely humorless person. Not so. Kaplan did display a sense of humor on various occasions, but it was of a different variety. It was serious humor! It was largely cerebral, centering on paradoxes and anomalies which tickled the intellect, not the viscera. It was, at times, sharp and cutting, pricking our vanities and pomposities.

Kaplan was a prodigious and tireless worker who drove himself as well as his students. He assumed teaching and lecturing schedules which would have knocked out anyone with lesser stamina. He taught, he wrote, he studied, he debated, he lectured extensively and still managed to be the rabbi of a congregation which he had created in his own image. Everything revolved around his central passion, to guide the perplexed of his generation and to generate the same devotion and commitment to the survival and perpetuation of the heritage which moved him.

With such a teacher there was never a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom. Here was a man who was probing deeply into the traditional sources, examining everything with a critical eye, weighing, measuring, appraising, tearing down and reconstructing. Since he could abide neither indolence nor stupidity, we were always on guard. It was fatal to be unprepared in class; no excuse sufficed, unless one was a masochist and enjoyed the professor's wrathful outbursts. It was dangerous to speak up in class unless we knew what we were talking about. There was nothing better for peace of mind than silence. Yet, some of the most exhilarating moments in the classroom were when students had something worth

while to say and Kaplan engaged in dialogue with them. He was at his best dissecting and analyzing an idea and eliciting all its implications. What a mind!

Kaplan was listed in the Seminary Register as Professor of Homiletics. The description of the course in the 1930 Register reads:

Lectures on the theory of preaching and its relation to the spiritual needs of Jewish life, supplemented by practice in writing and delivering sermons . . .
2 hours

In another section of the Register, under the heading SERMONS, the following requirement is outlined:

Every student of the second, third and fourth year is required to deliver at least one sermon a year from the pulpit of the Seminary Synagogue, and to write one additional sermon yearly, as exercises in Homiletics.

In the case of sermons to be delivered at the Seminary, students must submit the outline to the professor of Homiletics at least a fortnight before the date assigned for the delivery of the sermon in class.

Kaplan was aware that his course in Homiletics was not held in high esteem among his colleagues on the faculty. It had been introduced as a grudging concession to the needs of students who were preparing for the congregational rabbinate. Since Kaplan was a practicing rabbi, he was selected by Schechter to teach the students the art of preaching, but he did not like what he was engaged to do. He was not interested in homiletics, in the art and technique of preaching. The regulations governing the course could have seriously hampered him, so he disregarded them. Of the two hours a week allotted him, he chose to use the first one for the presentation of his philosophy of Judaism. Here he articulated his theological views, his interpretation of the evolving Jewish tradition, his analysis of the various solutions to meet the challenge of modernity and, supremely, his own, unique prescription for creative Jewish survival. He transformed Homiletics into the most exciting and stimulating course in the curriculum. It was a belated recognition, many years later, which relieved Kaplan of the chair in Homiletics and established him, *de jure*, as Seminary Professor of Philosophies of Religion.

There was, however, the second hour that had to be accounted for. Students were required to preach in the Seminary Synagogue and Kaplan was responsible for preparing them adequately. For him it was, no doubt, a heavy burden; for the student it was an ordeal by fire. There was the psychological hurdle which he faced in preaching in a synagogue where the majority of the congregation consisted of his teachers and their families. I remember getting goose pimples just at the prospect of standing in the pulpit and facing Ginzberg, Marx, Davidson, et al. But first there were the personal encounters with Kaplan to prepare for the great event. At the initial conference, the student was required to present several themes, with texts and propositions for consideration. When these were unacceptable, as frequently happened, he had to submit another set

of themes. The process could be repeated a number of times. Finally, when everything was agreed upon, the student went into seclusion for a few weeks to prepare the great masterpiece.

As I look back, after fifty years, I still shiver when I think of the Class Sermon. To stand in Kaplan's class to deliver the sermon was like being summoned to stand trial on the Day of Judgment before the Supreme Judge of the earth. Kaplan was at his worst in the lack of restraint in dealing with a poor, insipid, mediocre sermon. He could not tolerate a shoddy or slovenly presentation — and these were not infrequent occurrences in our Homiletics class. The hapless victims of his verbal explosions, I am sure, have carried the scars all through life. "You have said nothing that conveys a message, an idea, just a string of meaningless platitudes. You are supposed to say something in a sermon; after all, you are not writing a PhD thesis. No one will ever listen to this kind of nonsense." And so on. It was painful for the students to listen to this angry scolding (and who knew who would be next?). Perhaps it was painful for Kaplan to have to do it.

But he was also at his best. Even in the good sermons, he was quick to detect the occasional flaw, the weakness. He always insisted on intellectual excellence and honesty. He despised glib and superficial oratory and demanded that every statement, every proposition, be examined critically with an open mind and without preconceived notions. It had to be authentic, relevant and significant. I can still see him, his face screwed up, his brows knit intensely as he analyzed the text and proposition of the sermon. He had a verbal mannerism of saying, "I mean . . . you see . . . I mean . . ." as he struggled to articulate an idea. There was an amusing moment one day in class when, during a discussion, he recommended highly a book which he had just read. The title: *The Meaning of Meaning*.

Kaplan taught us how to think and not to be afraid to think. He made us question all our assumptions, even our most cherished beliefs, *Torah min hashamayim*, the Mosaic authorship of the Torah, the binding authority of the Talmud and the Codes. He taught us how to evaluate traditional concepts, how to reinterpret traditional values and how to integrate them into an acceptable philosophy of Judaism. He made no pretense of trying to teach us how to preach; he was concerned with teaching us what to say.

Kaplan's greatest influence as a teacher in the Seminary took place during the two decades of the twenties and thirties. Many of us, in flight from the Orthodoxy of our youth, were most receptive to his teaching. We were persuaded that he had found the right path and was leading us on it. We sensed that we were participants in a great spiritual and intellectual revolution that would change the face of American Judaism. We were certain that Kaplan's philosophy would, in time, penetrate all branches of Judaism, and would lead the confused and the bewildered into an acceptance and affirmation of the Jewish heritage.

I still maintain that belief, though the signs today seem to point in

other directions. Religious revolutions are a long time in the making and one must wait a hundred years or more before their results can be properly weighed and measured. In recent decades the revolt against rationalism has been in the ascendancy and the influence of Kaplan's thought and teaching has been in eclipse. Fashions in theology and philosophy change with the seasons and it is likely that there will be some new thought patterns and designs for a new generation. But there will always be men and women who cherish the life of reason and who need a religious way of life based on a rational philosophy of Judaism within the context of the classical tradition. For such people Kaplan will prove to be, as he was for our generation, a compelling and inspiring teacher. We are still nourished by the brilliance of his mind and the glow of his shining spirit. *Ko Lehoi*, Professor!

Dr. Kaplan as a Teacher

DAVID LIEBER

SOLOMON SCHECHTER'S VISION OF THE SEMINARY was a place where bright young men came to sit at the feet of great scholars and, in the relatively brief time during which he headed the school, he helped make the dream a reality. The youngest of the legendary faculty whom he assembled was Mordecai Kaplan, the only one among them who had studied at the Seminary and had reached his maturity in America. The choice was deliberate. Schechter wanted someone close to the students in spirit, who had faced the same problems that they did while growing up, and was grappling with the realities of American Jewish life. He could not have chosen better. For most of the five decades that Kaplan taught at the Rabbinical School no one challenged the students more to face the problems of living as a thinking Jew in the twentieth century. Willy nilly, each one found himself compelled to articulate his own view of Judaism and to submit it to critical examination. Much depended, of course, on the individual's background and philosophical sophistication. But no one could pass through Kaplan's hands without being affected both deeply and personally.

Sitting in Kaplan's classes in the forties was anything but a relaxing experience. Here was the great man, himself, taking on teenagers in the Seminary College and young rabbinical students and treating them as intellectual equals. Meticulously prepared for every session, he expected no less from the young people in front of him. Whether it was a course in Midrash or philosophies of religion or homiletics, Kaplan's assignments were clear, well chosen and, as a rule, not terribly demanding. Still, students being what they are, they were not always prepared. Kaplan would get terribly upset and he did not hesitate to dress them down, pointing to the incongruity between their professed interest in learning and teaching and their own behavior. On one or two occasions, to underscore his chagrin, he even refused to conduct the class.

Kaplan was a conscientious teacher. He never repeated a course without altering its outline and readings. Fortunately, he also taught a variety of subjects, so that he was able to change his method and pace in the three classes that a number of students took with him each year. Midrash was his text course, but he was not particularly interested in it *qua* text. Of course, he required that the students understand and interpret, as they would any other classic text. But he did not stop there. Of greater concern to him was the students' ability to reinterpret it in contemporary

DAVID LIEBER is president of *The University of Judaism* and vice-chancellor of *The Jewish Theological Seminary*.

terms. Midrash, he argued, is an ongoing process, one which should be cultivated in our time. In line with this view, he often spoke of the need for a modern Midrash and demonstrated with great ingenuity what it might look like.

In teaching philosophies of religion, Kaplan again was not primarily interested in intellectual history or comparative studies, but in eliciting from each writer those teachings which were seminal either for later Jewish thought or for his own understanding of the function of religion in life. The more traditional students sometimes felt that he was not always fair to the earlier thinkers. The graduate philosophy students in the class, on the other hand, did not always agree with his interpretation of more recent western thought. Still, all of them could not help being impressed by the scope of his reading and the way that all of it became grist for his own independent thinking.

Kaplan's courses in homiletics saw him at his best. It was here that his passionate commitment to Judaism and the future of the Jewish people came through most clearly. The pulpit, he believed, was the major platform in the Jewish community. A dedicated preacher, he maintained, could have a profound influence on the course of Jewish life and he had no patience with those who threw away that opportunity through ignorance or sloppy habits of thinking. One had the impression that, for him, a sermon was a work of art with classical form of its own. It began with a scriptural text often coupled with its Midrashic interpretation. From it flowed the central theme of the sermon which was stated succinctly in the proposition. Each element of the latter was then interpreted and applied to the contemporary scene. The unity of the sermon, in other words, was organic. What gave it authority was its being anchored in the scriptural reading of the week. What made it relevant was the proposition drawn from it. What provided its moving power was the analysis and application.

Generations of rabbinical students will remember having had to submit their sermon outlines to Kaplan before preaching them in class. Even more, they very likely will recall the session or two that they had with him before composing the finished product. It was in these one-on-one encounters that the intensity of his classroom presence was relaxed and the student was given a chance to glimpse the man behind the deep voice and flashing eyes. He was still no less demanding, but he was no longer intimidating. He took time for a word of encouragement, for a personal bit of advice.

Kaplan's effectiveness in the classroom cannot be separated from the total impact that he had on his students. Before any of them actually met him, they already had at least a passing acquaintance with some of his ideas as expressed in his books and articles. They also knew of him as the *enfant terrible* of the faculty, the iconoclast who did not hesitate to take sharp issue with his colleagues. They knew that, like themselves, he had been raised in a traditional home and had broken with Orthodoxy as a result of his modern studies. Still, he had remained an observant Jew,

having established a new basis for Jewish religious practices which was consonant with twentieth century thought. They admired his forthright rejection of traditionalism and his insistence on a rigorous reconstruction of Judaism which would enable it to play the same role in the life of the contemporary sophisticated Jew that it had played in the life of his ancestors. It sounded exciting on paper. What many questioned was its effectiveness in real life situations. Would not one's adherence to the ritual *mizvot* be weakened by their translation into folkways and sancta? Was it really possible to pray to a "process" rather than to a "person"?

These and other questions were at least partially resolved as the students became acquainted with Kaplan and his own personal practices. It was obvious that here was a man who was totally committed to integrity, who could not abide any kind of dishonesty, who — in his own life, at any rate — had found a way to synthesize the observance of the *halakhah* with a religious naturalism. Furthermore, to watch him in prayer was to see him transported. Clearly, his prayers were not addressed to "to whom it may concern," as some of his irreverent critics had suggested. He seemed to achieve this attitude to prayer without compartmentalizing his thinking; otherwise, why would he insist on changing some of the prayers which he found intellectually or morally indefensible? All he had to do was to argue that the statements which one affirmed in prayer belonged to another universe of discourse from those that one actually believed and then be able to retain the traditional prayerbook without any significant changes. But this was not an acceptable approach for him.

It was not surprising, then, that Kaplan exerted a profound influence on his students. Some became his disciples, which pleased him greatly, since he was convinced that Reconstructionism was the only viable approach to Jewish living. Others felt that the logic of his position led to a secular humanism in which there was no room for either God or prayer. Still others, and they seem to have been the majority, did not go so far as to become Reconstructionists, but they adopted his view of Jewish peoplehood and much of his vocabulary, such as "religious civilization" and "organic community."

Some students were particularly privileged to come close to Kaplan during the years when he was hammering out his own approach to Judaism. They met in his home on an ongoing basis for discussion and study, and some remained lifelong Reconstructionists. Even those who did not were profoundly influenced by those sessions and a few, like the late Max Kadushin, were sufficiently stimulated to carve out their own interpretations of Judaism. Kaplan was not always happy with the directions that they took — he really seems to have preferred the master-disciple relationship — but he was unfailingly gracious to them and they remained on cordial terms with him.

During his last years before he settled in Israel, Kaplan spent four winters at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles where he lectured to large audiences and taught both graduate students and adults. He consid-

ered no class too small or insignificant. Wherever people gathered who wanted to study with him, he made himself available, preparing as thoroughly and meticulously as he had in his earlier years. By now an octogenarian, he welcomed people into his small apartment to discuss his views in great detail and, more than once, he treated his guests to a full lecture, sharing with them a new insight or a more up to date articulation of his philosophy. Mellowed by his years and by his vivacious Rivka, he was now and then able to relax his otherwise total seriousness. On rare occasions, he even seemed able to laugh at himself, something which was not noticeable in his Seminary days.

One of Kaplan's favorite texts was Midrash *Hazitah*, citing the verse from Proverbs 22:24: "Do you see a man who is skillful at his work? He will stand in the presence of kings." The Midrash applies it to a variety of individuals and then observes that "The verse refers to the righteous who devote themselves to the task set for them by the Holy One, blessed be He, serving the cause of Torah all of their lives." Throughout his long life, Kaplan has exemplified that kind of dedication and, as his students will attest, has been a source of inspiration and wisdom to them.

“I Also Am Evolving”

DENNIS C. SASSO

IT WAS MY ZEKHUT TO HAVE BEEN AMONG THE last rabbinical students to study formally under Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan in the United States, before he and Mrs. Kaplan went on *aliyah* to Israel. It was the academic year 1969–70, and I was in my first year at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (a member of the second entering class since the founding of the college.) The announcement that Dr. Kaplan would teach the Seminar on Reconstructionism surprised and excited us.

Dr. Kaplan was 89 years old when he taught us for a semester in Philadelphia. The weight of years showed around his swollen ankles, but he would still energetically stomp his feet with enthusiasm or disapproval at students' comments. His wise, engaging, deep-blue gaze circled the room in search of intelligent answers or challenging questions.

I was one of three students who lived on the top floor of the old remodeled brownstone which houses the College at 2308 North Broad Street. This fact afforded me the opportunity of some additional informal contact with Rabbi Kaplan, who came in once a week, by train from New York, to teach us in Philadelphia. Before going back to New York, he would nap on the extra bed in my room. What a thrill, I thought, to be able to tell my children and grandchildren that *gedol hador* Mordecai Kaplan had slept in my room!

After his energies were thus restored, I often had the pleasure of accompanying him to the train in the afternoon. Weather permitting, he always preferred to go on foot rather than to accept a ride. He would walk from the train station in North Philadelphia to the College in the morning — a distance of more than half a mile — and then back again in the afternoon. “*Barukh . . . rofeh kol basar umaflī la-asot.*” (Praised is the source of health who performs wonders.)¹

In the classroom, Dr. Kaplan was as we had been prepared to experience him: intolerant of those who arrived late or came unprepared, impatient with intellectual shabbiness, contemptuous of clichés and shallow or unthought-through assumptions. Yet, he was, in surprising ways, flexible and humble. He never hesitated to compliment a student, or to acknowledge, from one week to another, the influence that some comment or statement from a member of the class might have had upon his

1. From the Siddur, Morning Blessings.

thought. Once, when a student pointed out to Dr. Kaplan that his opinion in class differed from something he had written or said earlier, he replied (with a grin) playing on his definition of Judaism: "I also am *evolving*."

On one occasion, Dr. Kaplan became irate when the members of one of his classes failed to appear at the appointed time. He collected his materials, rose, strode from the room, made his way down the circular staircase and out of the College building and then proceeded to walk toward the train station. When the students were made aware of his departure, they sent an emissary to bring him back, explaining that a special circumstance had accounted for their tardiness. It was near Dr. Kaplan's 90th birthday, and the students had been gathered in the kitchen putting the final touches on a cake as a surprise for him. A forgiving and appreciative Rav returned to the classroom to give thanks, celebrate and engage in Torah with his disciples.

Rabbi Kaplan evidently enjoyed the fact that even then, as he was about to become a nonagenarian, he was engaged actively in teaching and personally helping to shape a new generation of rabbinic leaders. He had been, for so many decades, a decisive influence at the Jewish Theological Seminary. He had long disapproved of the notion that his Reconstructionist disciples would organize into a Fourth Movement, but, finally, he not only consented, he proudly and joyously contributed his personal strength and wisdom to mold a new kind of rabbi for modern Judaism.

At the time when he was teaching us, his newest book, *The Religion of Ethical Nationhood*, was ready for publication. The very last section of it deals with "The Rabbinic Training For Our Day." I have read and re-read those pages since that time and now have a better understanding of exactly what Dr. Kaplan was so insistent upon eleven years ago. A truly wonderful facet of his thinking was that, having lived 90 years, with so much knowledge and understanding of the past, he was more concerned about, and sensitive to, the present, than were we, the students who had just emerged from the turbulent and perplexing sixties.

... Rabbinic training nowadays is called upon to meet ... the need of fostering a sense of the living reality of the Jewish people and consciously developing the implications of such reality.²

That is why, he emphasized, the rabbinical institution must focus on the present, and

... its concern with the past ... (should be) dictated solely by the purpose of understanding the determining focus that should operate in Jewish life today and in helping the rabbis to cope with the insistent Jewish problems of the present.³

The type of school which the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College chose to become, and the kind of training which would be offered there, were very much influenced by Kaplan's determination that

2. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *The Religion of Ethical Nationhood* (N.Y.: MacMillan, 1970), p. 188.

3. Ibid., p. 188.

the rabbi should not be a walking sarcophagus of dead ideas about religion, but an interpreter of the experiences of the inner or outer life in terms of religion that are understandable and relevant.⁴

It is imperative that the rabbi be a scholar, with competence in the sources of our past, but it is also indispensable that rabbis be conversant with, and sensitive to, the insights which social sciences, especially in the areas of psychology, sociology and comparative religious studies, offer into the religious understanding of modern man. The modern rabbi must be able not only to transmit and communicate the heritage of the past, but to adapt it to changing conditions, to be a "builder" [in Rabbi Johanan's understanding⁵], one who can renovate, reconstitute and reconstruct not just a heritage but the people who go along with that heritage and without whom it is meaningless. For the Jewish heritage should be regarded not as a museum, but as a laboratory for living. "The rabbinical school should enable (the rabbinical student) to transmit the desire for a substantial Jewish life, for Jewish communal organization and responsibility . . ."⁶

For one entire session, Rabbi Kaplan quizzed us on what word or concept best summarized the purpose of religion, of Jewish religion in particular. Student after student was required to express his ideas and to make a case for his view. Those influenced by Eliade talked about the "Sacred versus the Profane;" others referred to Heschel's notion of the "Ineffable;" still others invoked Buber's "Eternal Thou." However, the concept which Kaplan was seeking to elicit was "responsibility." The central conviction which informs Kaplan's approach to Judaism, and to the religious life, is that the Jew, the human being, is called upon to be "responsible."

For Kaplan, Hillel had summarized the goals of the religious life in his tripartite proclamation which involves an awareness of personal and collective identities and the responsibilities that they entail.

If I am not (responsible) for myself, who is (responsible) for me? But if (I care) for myself alone, (of) what (consequence) am I? Therefore, if (I do) not (do something about it) now, when?

Responsibility to our own selves, self-esteem, self-respect, translated into the service of our fellow human beings are the categorical imperatives of Jewish ethics. God is in the *Eimatai* — the urgent "when?" The urgency with which we experience the need for personal and communal salvation is an index of our religiosity. God is the source of the motivation to be fully ourselves in order that we may then transcend ourselves. This view applies to the individual as well as to the national group. This is what the Torah means by "a kingdom of priests and a holy people."

The Mishnah *Avot* comments: "Happy is the human being that he is created in the divine image. An additional sign of grace was bestowed

4. Ibid., pp. 193-4.

5. *Shabbat*, 114a.

6. *The Religion of Ethical Nationhood*, p. 190.

upon us by our awareness that we are created in the divine image.” Kaplan’s approach to Judaism, his commitment to the refinement and education of the Jew at the individual and communal levels, is founded upon this rabbinic principle. We are called upon to fulfill our potential, to live up to the divine which animates us. Man aware of himself becomes man cognizant of his divine purpose. Man is the only being capable of cogitating on his own existence. Responsible man acts out the implications of that cogitation. This is the source not only of ethical action, but of the religious attitude.

Anyone who has had the opportunity of talking with, and especially studying with, Rabbi Kaplan will abandon the simplistic notion that his approach to religion and to Judaism is purely rationalistic. True, Kaplan’s prose is often dry. True, in his writings he addresses himself primarily to intellectual, organizational and pragmatic concerns of the Jew and the Jewish community. But, there is also in him a poetic chord, as evidenced by such inspired creations as *God – The Life Of Nature*. To experience Kaplan in the classroom is to be exposed both to a scientific and to a sentient teacher. Despite his Graetz-like dislike of “mysticism” which reflects the periods of his formation, there is in Kaplan not just a Doctor, but a Rabbi; there is no separation between the heart and the mind. For him, intensity of feeling precedes depth of commitment and understanding. Attachment to a people, pathos for its past, burning devotion to its future, all inform his critical analysis of its present. The joy and the fury of being a Jew precede the scrutiny of what it means to be a Jew.

Subjectivity and objectivity blend in Kaplan’s writings and teachings to provide a holistic approach to Judaism, which some critics of Reconstructionism fail to appreciate because they usually have been outside the orbit of experiential Reconstructionism. When a comprehensive anthology of Kaplan’s writings is published (in the near future, I hope), it will be necessary to devote a substantial segment to the non-rational, the emotional, the subjective and poetic dimensions of his philosophy and program. These facets are integral to a total understanding of his personal experience and of his teaching; to ignore them is to do him an injustice and to misunderstand the theory and practice of Reconstructionism.

Another aspect of Kaplan’s thinking, which came through in his teaching, was his universalism. Most people tend to view Reconstructionism as a rather particularistic understanding of Judaism. The fact is that Reconstructionism does emphasize the uniqueness of the Jewish experience and seeks to define Judaism in terms of its civilizational character. Perhaps more than any other version of Judaism, as evident from the elimination of the affirmation of chosenness in its liturgy, Reconstructionism is universalist in its outlook; but, Reconstructionism addresses the universal in terms of the particular. Kaplan has been most insistent that the Jewish vocation is to contribute to the establishment of world peace. In his last book, *The Religion of Ethical Nationhood*, he reiterates the idea that in order for people to arise to their potential, they must deal directly with

what Kaplan calls the human Copernican revolution — that is, that we are not at the center of the universe. In the same sense, the Jewish people, and all mature people, should organize their strengths and recognize their limitations in order to assess properly their individual-collective "gravity."

Kaplan sought to imbue us with a sense that the modern rabbi serves not only the Jewish people, but the religious needs of human beings at large. Rabbinic training, he insisted,

must emancipate the mind of the rabbinical student from the provincial notions about religion and direct him toward the permanent human needs which religion seeks to meet. Only then will he be able to distinguish between the transitory and the abiding in the various religious expressions of the human race.⁷

Kaplan's optimism regarding the possibilities for the improvement of humanity informed his early writings and have continued to characterize his most recent writings and teaching, as well. He has been criticized for this by those who, especially as a result of the Holocaust and the devastation of the post-Holocaust world, see man as too prone to evil or even irredeemable.

Kaplan's optimism is not based on naivete; it is a call to action. It emanates from a recognition that despite all the terror and the horror that man has inflicted — and will continue to inflict — our answers are not *bashamayim* or *me-ever layam*. Man's best hope is still man. The rabbi, he insists, is the person who devotes himself to voice, teach and demonstrate "the possibilities for the salvation of mankind, which inhere in the process of moral and spiritual growth in accordance with the spirit of Torah."⁸

In an article in honor of Kaplan's 70th birthday, Mortimer J. Cohen points out that Kaplan, the teacher, always distinguished between the *vivid* and the *vital*. A rabbi is entrusted with the task of accomplishing both in terms of his teaching of the Jewish tradition.

To make something "vivid" is to recreate it in the imagination of the audience, but it is a process that merely summons up the past. To make something "vital" is to make the past relevant to the present. It is a life-giving, a life-dealing process; it is life-sustaining and life-illuminating.⁹

Kaplan has insisted, over his entire career as a teacher of teachers, and rabbi of rabbis, that it is not enough to "learn and to teach" (*lilmod u'lelamed*) nor even to "keep and observe" (*lishmor vela-asot*) but that in "teaching and observing" our *eyes should become enlightened* (*ha'er einenu b'toratekha*) so that we may gain insights from the past about what the present requires as the future unfolds.

So has Mordecai Kaplan, may his strength increase, taught us to allow what *was* to impact on what *is*, as we help create what *ought to be*.

7. Ibid., p. 195.

8. Ibid., p. 197.

9. Mortimer J. Cohen, "Mordecai M. Kaplan a Teacher," in *Mordecai M. Kaplan: An Evaluation*, edited by Ira Eisenstein and Eugene Kohn (New York: Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation, 1952), p. 4.

God in Kaplan's Philosophy

JACOB B. AGUS

MORDECAI M. KAPLAN IS MORE A PROPHET than a philosopher. While a philosopher builds his system on a generalization, a prophet bases his message on a moral intuition. Of course, great philosophers include a moral intuition in their world-view, and the classical prophets observed the unfolding of history in their day with a keen eye and arrived at some sweeping generalizations. But in spite of occasional convergences, the difference in tone and feeling is obvious. Like a philosopher, a prophet is a zealous seeker of truth and a fearless foe of dissimulation, but while a philosopher seeks to explain, a prophet aims to transform. The prophet is preeminently a single-minded messenger consecrated to the service of his people. He feels the presence of God and the anguish of his people so keenly that all ethical and spiritual values strike him as insistent demands of the Lord — “thus says the Lord.”

To the prophet, the high destiny of his people is a supreme imperative. Those who fail to heed it, going their separate ways, are not merely erring humans; they are “lost sheep,” worshippers of “the abomination of desolation.” In his own lifetime, the prophet may seem to fail, but, in the long run, his impact is certain.

Living in an age of ruthless skepticism, Kaplan, the prophet of religious renewal, was impelled to write like a philosopher. He coopted the labors of the sociologists and the anthropologists; he defined his terms with precision and he tried hard to beam his message to the antenna of the latest version of “modern man.” His inner faith was firm and deep, but his rhetoric, designed for the ears of skeptics, was at times bland and pale. In his effort to win the assent of secularists, he tended to flatten the meaning of faith and to exalt the all-embracing feelings of peoplehood.

Consider his definitions of God:

“God is the life of the universe” (*Judaism as a Civilization*, p. 316); “The God-idea is an expression of man’s will to live” (*Ibid.*, p. 310); “The God-idea in every collective religion functions not as an intellectual assent to a proposition but as an organic acceptance” (*Ibid.*).

Each of these sentences calls to mind a different world-view — a Bergsonian *élan vital*, a Jamesian *will to believe*, an anthropological approach to the study of primitive societies à la Durkheim. Whatever validity these philosophies possess, they are not self-evident. Kaplan supplies the parameters of a modern philosophy of God, which is compatible with the *natura naturans* of Spinoza, the “deity” of Alexander or the “organism” of Whitehead. Such a philosophy is “Jewish” in the sense of continuing the

development begun in the Hebrew Bible, where monotheism had its genesis and the life of the Jewish people was interpreted in the light of that faith (*The Future of the American Jew*, p. 207).

In the last quotation, "collective religion" or "folk religion" is distinguished from the personal faith of a mystic or of a religious philosopher. Kaplan regarded "collective religion" as a normal dimension of tribal life. In its struggle for survival, the tribe projects unto the metaphysical void the image of a deity which personifies its past and its future. Thereby, the strength of each individual is reinforced by the imagined soul of the tribe, conceived as a god, who is revealed in its various *sancta*.

A minimum of faith is needed for the acceptance of a tribal religion, which derives from, and in turn brings fresh vigor to, the many-sided civilization of the tribe. In this sense, tribalism and its historical religion are inseparable. "A folk religion retains its validity and relevance as long as it confines itself to those who have evolved it" (*Judaism . . .*, p. 343).

In the Thirties, Kaplan assumed that universal religions, like Christianity and Islam, were dying societies, due to be replaced by forms of "sacred ethnicism." His prescription for the saving of Judaism emerged out of his analysis of the dependence of a "folk religion" upon its ethnic civilization. Hence, he wrote, "paradoxical as it may sound, the spiritual regeneration of the Jewish people demands that religion cease to be its sole preoccupation" (*Judaism . . .*, p. 345).

Ethnocentric religion is balanced, in Kaplan's world-view, by his personal faith and his moral intuition. So, he acknowledges God as a felt presence, the source and the goal of all that is ideal.

Consider the following descriptions:

"He must be felt as a presence, if we want not only to know about God but to know God" (*The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion*, p. 244). In worship, God is felt as "a transcendent Power" (*Ibid.*, p. 258). "There is a Power within man and above man that gives him no rest" (*Ibid.*, p. 293). Kaplan quotes, approvingly, Matthew Arnold's formulation, "God as the Power that makes for righteousness — not ourselves" (*Ibid.*, p. 297). He speaks of the original prophetic discovery of the moral law as the principal self-revelation of God (*Ibid.*, p. 303).

Explaining why humanism is not enough, he offers the definition of God "as the Power that endorses what we believe ought to be, and that guarantees that it will be" (*Ibid.*, p. 324). Furthermore, he insists, "The need for communing with that Power is part of our very will to live as human beings" (*The Future . . .*, p. 184). At times, he refers to "the intuitive experience of cosmic Power" as "the substance of religion." Still, he maintains that, in our scientific age, God should be addressed as a "Process" rather than as "an identifiable entity," adding a caveat, "the God-process is transnatural." It is akin to man's soul — "the soul-process too is super-factual, super-experiential and transnatural" (*The Future . . .* pp. 182, 183).

Kaplan can hold these differing views because he makes light of the

distinction between Life and Spirit as manifestations of God's revelation in human experience. To this reviewer, the crucial issues of history center on this distinction, which marked the transition from paganism to Judaism. Paganism celebrated the exuberance of life. In its Hindu form, paganism declared all living things to be holy. The prophets of Judaism affirmed the transcendent source of the life of spirit — the quest of truth for its own sake; the claims of justice and love superseding those of the ethnic will to live; the sanctity of individual rights as against those of *raison d'état*; the sublime and the holy pointing toward the realm of the Beyond.

If we view Kaplan's books, as a series, we recognize an increasing emphasis on religious values. In *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion*, he refuses to reduce Jewish loyalty to mere survivalism. Ideals and values must be set on a higher plane than the sheer existence of the community. In *The Religion of Ethical Nationhood* he stresses this prophetic theme more insistently. In the following sentences he submerges the ethnic to the humanistic ideal:

Paradoxical as it may seem, if a nation wishes to survive, it must not make survival itself its supreme objective, but rather aim at the achievement of the highest intellectual, esthetic and social good that alone makes national survival important to its individual members (*The Meaning . . .*, p. 352).

Religious rhetoric is crucial to the vitality of the religious imagination. When, instead of employing traditional terms, we refer to God as "the Power that makes for salvation," conceived in this-worldly, personal and social goals, or the Power working for "social regeneration," "for cooperation," "for freedom," "for righteousness," do we gain in persuasiveness and effectiveness?

To this reviewer, such descriptions ring hollow. As a pragmatist, Kaplan identifies God by the consequences that presumably flow from His Being. But prayer assumes a Being, not a process. We pray to a Savior, a Redeemer, a Liberator, a Father, even to a King, though we know that these titles apply to God only as metaphors. We follow the logic of language, which runs deep. Can we set aside the numinal reference, without emptying religion of all mystery and power? Or is man incurably metaphysical?

Does it require less faith to affirm a single Power that impels us toward all that is ideal than to assert one's faith in God, as a Supreme Personality, "Who daily renews by His goodness the works of creation"? In both cases, our faith rests on a moral intuition that implies two axioms — first, the universe and all within it cannot be understood by mechanistic reason alone, and second, our mind and spirit point to a Supreme Being who can best be suggested by the various metaphors of personality. Kaplan regarded the so called "death of God" ideologies as instances of spiritual degeneracy. His moral intuition remained unshaken throughout the eight decades of his wrestling with the ultimate mystery of existence.

As to Kaplan's position in the spectrum between the ethicists and

estheticians, there can be hardly any doubt that he identified with Amos and Aḥad Ha-am as against those who followed Keats in asserting "beauty is truth, truth is beauty; that is all you know and all you need to know." Esthetics as the clue to the character of the divine is our heritage from the ancient Hellenic world. Kaplan is deeply aware of the role of art in every civilization. But, there can be no doubt of his commitment to the prophetic belief that the moral law is an unfailing guide to the Will of God. And he stresses the crucial place of law in the pattern of a good society as against the importance of individual acts of generosity and love.

In assessing what we know of God's Being, there comes to mind the experience of Paul in Athens, where he encountered a monument bearing a dedication "to the unknown God." He used that inscription as the text of his sermon on monotheism — "what therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you" (*Acts* 17:23).

A modernist Jew may agree with the philosophers of Athens that God in His essence remains unknown and still disagree with Paul's belief that any man can presume with certainty to "proclaim" Him. Yet, Jewish philosophers like Philo, who maintained that God was "unknowable," addressed God through metaphors — such as, "our Father" and "Sovereign" and "Logos." Maimonides, philosopher *par excellence*, devotes the entire first part of his *Guide* to an analysis of the ascent of Biblical rhetoric from the concrete to the divine.

Metaphors in religion are more than aids to communication. They involve the total orientation of loyalties, those of the individual and the community. They serve to direct man's outreach toward the divine Soul of souls (*neshamah lineshamah*). For a person is a self-transcending being, impelled to become more than he is — "and be ye holy, for I am holy."

Maimonides recognized a sphere of ideas, which are not true in themselves, but "necessary" — that is, valid psychologically and indispensable communally. They point toward metaphysical truths. Such ideas are the beliefs "that God hears our prayers" and is concerned with our individual well-being (*Guide of the Perplexed*, III, 28). As Kaplan concedes, at times, the life of religion is poetry in action.

When the concept of God is not defined independently, but only by reference to powers and processes that sustain and promote certain ideal ends, the emergence of values in the course of human history must be regarded as divine revelation. Do values emerge out of the life of nations or out of a growing sense of morality and humanity in all cultures?

Many scholars contrast the nature-centrality of paganism with the history-centrality of Judaism. In pagan festivals, the rhythm of nature is celebrated, whereas in Judaism the original agricultural festivals were reinterpreted to refer to the manifestation of God in history, particularly in the history of the Jewish people. Nature is universal, the background of all human experience. But history was, in the past, fragmented into the histories of various tribes and nations. What is normative in Jewish his-

tory, its insularity or its universality?

As we noted earlier, Kaplan's chief concern is the national dimension of religion. He assumes that ethnic religion is the ripe fruit of the tree of peoplehood. We need to make certain that the tree be well-tended, well-watered and well-groomed. The good fruit of a noble faith will then ripen as a matter of course. The metaphor of organism runs like a golden thread through Kaplan's books on Judaism.

Is this "organismic" reasoning valid? Does a vital faith grow naturally out of the life of a healthy and vigorous nation?

It would seem that the testimony of the Biblical prophets runs against any such connection.

The Jewish faith won the hearts of the people during the Babylonian exile, when the people were uprooted, dispersed and at the lowest ebb of their national life. The Talmudic sages noted that, in the history of our people, poverty and defeat were generally conjoined with moral greatness and spiritual efflorescence. Well-known is the fable of the emperor's daughter, marvelling at the beautiful wisdom stored in the mind of the ungainly Rabbi Joshua B. Hananyah.

The experience of the modern world also demonstrates that the passions of nationalism do not flow, of their own momentum, toward ideal ends. In European politics, "national" parties were invariably corrupted by the virus of narcissism. A "religion of ethical nationhood" is an ideal construct, in which the principle of universal morality is set over against, and perpetually in opposition to, the impulses of ethnocentrism.

It follows that the Kaplanian remedy for indifference to Judaism, the "reconstruction" of the organizational pattern of Jewish life, is only tangentially relevant to the task of revitalizing faith in God.

In the architecture of his philosophy, Kaplan brought together three elements — romantic folkism, rational liberalism and American pragmatism — which account for the complexity of his system. As a romantic folkist, he saw religion as the product of the collective experience of a people. As a liberal, he accorded supreme worth to individual freedom and to the critique of the fundamentalist view of the Jewish tradition. As a pragmatist, he manifests indifference to the logic of metaphysics.

Of the three components of his world-view, that of folkism was at once the most popular and the most controversial. In the generation which saw the tragic consequences of German folkism explode with elemental force, the Zionist enterprise was the only possible response. It seemed natural to conclude that "there, in the land of the fathers, *all* hopes will be realized" — all hopes, including that of the revitalization of faith in God.

Looking to the future, this reviewer believes that the liberal strand in Kaplan's thought is likely to prove most influential and enduring — his functional interpretation of basic Jewish ideas in the light of their historic evolution, his indomitable faith in the moral-rational approach to the

solution of contemporary problems, his courageous resistance against the tendency to self-mythification in the Jewish religion, his critique of seductive narcissism, his openness to innovations, his steadfast dedication to the wholeness of Jewish civilization. Above all, he represents, for our generation, the prophetic man of faith who loves his people and God with equal intensity and total self-giving. As the Midrash put it, the prophet is zealous for the "son" (Israel) as well as for the "father" (God).

Kaplan never tired of reminding us that "sonship" is not exclusive and not automatic; it is always a goal, never a secure possession. So, we address ourselves to God on Rosh Hashanah, *im kevonim*, *im ka-avodim*, be it as sons or be it as slaves. We can take charge of our personal careers, to a degree, but we cannot be certain of the status of our people. In the continuing task of re-examining "the meaning of God" in our life as a people, Kaplan's message and personality endure among our dearest treasures.

Kaplan's Hypothesis of Faith

MEIR BEN-HORIN

WHAT CONSTITUTES THE CORE OF KAPLAN'S faith-hypothesis, of that "faithfulness" which is aglow with passion for salvation?¹ If, for the moment, it may be called *deus sive transnatura*, God or transnature, what are its basic formulations and what is its warrant?

In "The God Idea in Judaism," an essay written in the mid-thirties, Kaplan set forth four propositions about the God idea. Of these, the most fundamental is the affirmation that at the basis of all forms of religion lies "the urge to salvation, or self-fulfillment, or living oneself out to the full." The Jewish People's particular form of religion is the articulation of this urge "through the unshakable faith that the whole of existence is so conditioned as to make salvation attainable." It is in this faith that

we have the unique element in the Jewish God idea. That the whole of existence is thus conditioned finds expression in the belief that God is one, the creator of the universe, and the lawgiver of mankind.²

In the opening paragraph of this essay the "unshakable faith" is introduced as "the one hypothesis" which "underlies the whole pattern of ideas which in one form or another constitute the conception of God."³

"When we believe in God," Kaplan wrote at about the same period of

1. The phrase is an adaption of Kaplan's definition of Torah as "culture aglow with a passion for righteousness" (*A New Approach to the Problem of Judaism* [New York: The Society for the Advancement of Judaism, 1924], p. 24). It carries overtones of Arnold's famous line that religion is "morality touched with emotion" (Matthew Arnold, *Literature and Dogma*, cited from *Dissent and Dogma*, ed. by R.H. Super [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1968], p. 176). — "Faithfulness" is Kaplan's translation of the biblical *emunah*, not "faith" (*The Religion of Ethical Nationhood* [New York: Macmillan, 1970], p. 18).

2. *The Jewish Reconstructionist Papers* (New York: Behrman House, 1936), p. 92; first published under the title "Why Humanism Is Not Enough," *Reconstructionist*, II, 7 (May 15, 1936): 12–16; it also appears in *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion* (New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1962), pp. 320–29.

3. *The Jewish Reconstructionist Papers*, p. 88. Following Kaplan, Jack J. Cohen defined God as "that quality of the universe, expressed in its order and its openness to purpose, which man is constantly discovering and upon which he relies to give meaning to his life. . . . Refusing to bow to doubts about the possibility of his achieving salvation, man assumes the meaning and the order; this is an act of faith." "Man's belief that the world is so constituted is his faith in God." In fact, "the view that the universe is amenable to human salvation is validated, if not proved, by every successful scientific experiment and prediction by a scientist" (*The Case for Religious Naturalism* [New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1958], pp. 130f.). As recently as early 1980, Ira Eisenstein declared that "moral responsibility and . . . moral courage . . . are indigenous" to the cosmos and that "all of nature is infused and suffused with this power that

time, "we believe that reality — the world of inner and outer being, the world of society and of nature — is so constituted as to enable man to achieve salvation."⁴ Nature is "a cosmos and not a chaos,"⁵ and life, therefore, is inherently worthwhile, sacred, yielding "some cosmic meaning." If we believe that "reality is so constituted as to endorse and guarantee the realization in man of that which is of greatest value to him," we believe in God. Yet this belief "is not susceptible of proof."⁶ Fortunately, nothing negative attaches to this unsusceptibility: "For the religious life . . . no metaphysical speculation" is necessary beyond the "fundamental assumption," beyond the faith-hypothesis.⁷

makes for salvation which we call God" ("Religious Alternatives for the Contemporary Jew," *Reconstructionist*, XIV, 9 (January 1980): 9f. Kaplan, *Religion of Ethical Nationhood*, p. 10, saw God as "the functioning in nature of the eternally creative process, which . . . actuates man to self-fulfilment."

4. *The Meaning of God*, p. 26.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 28. But *Religion of Ethical Nationhood*, pp. 51 and 54, refers to nature as "infinite chaos," "endless chaos." The contradiction, however, is not serious. "Nature is cosmos" means nature "is so constituted" as to function cosmopoetically. "Nature is chaos" is only half the truth. The second part of Kaplan's statement reaffirms the faith-hypothesis: "Nature is infinite chaos, with all its evils forever being vanquished by creativity, which is God as infinite goodness." He is the Power that "brings order out of endless chaos and good out of actual and potential evil." And He is "the creative process of the cosmos," *i.e.*, nature's transnature.

6. *The Meaning of God*, p. 29.

7. Milton Steinberg in *Anatomy of Faith*, ed. by Arthur A. Cohen (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1960), pp. 181ff., 248ff., criticized Kaplan's theology as "being a theology without a metaphysic" and, hence, being "really not a theology at all." In Steinberg's view, Kaplan denies that "metaphysics is necessary to theology." In Kaplan's "dispatch of the metaphysical problem" Steinberg always found the "most grievous difficulties with his thought." For such denial or dispatch I find no evidence. Kaplan spoke of *religious life* as not requiring metaphysical speculation, but this is far from saying that *theology* requires no metaphysical speculation. In this distinction Kaplan followed Arnold, who fought theological argumentations in defense of God as person, of miracles, of reading the Bible as science. Kaplan's position (*The Meaning of God*, p. 304) is that the canonical Prophets "were not metaphysicians but pragmatists concerned not with the *being* of God, but with what God *meant* to those who called upon Him in prayer and worship." In *Judaism as a Civilization*, pp. 329f., Kaplan contrasts religion and metaphysics, but the importance of metaphysics is not denied: "We need today a philosophy of Judaism which will achieve for our generation what the philosophy of Maimonides did for his" (*Judaism in Transition* [New York: Covici-Friede, 1936], p. 186). In response to a comment on a point in his splendid paper entitled "Toward a Philosophy of Cultural Integration" (Hans J. Morgenthau noted its "great brilliance") in *Approaches to Group Understanding*, ed. by Lyman Bryson, Louis Finkelstein, Robert M. MacIver [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947], Kaplan remarked, "As little as I have a 'positivistic antipathy' to religions, so little do I have to metaphysics. Indeed, I assume that we can no more dispense with metaphysics than we can with religion. But . . . no particular metaphysics . . . can hope to appear equally true to all. It cannot, therefore, serve as a means of communication among various cultures or religions" (p. 602; Morgenthau's comment is on p. 588).

(In spite of the quotations adduced above and the considerations advanced by the author, Kaplan's writings manifest a profound distaste for, if not an outright rejection of, metaphysics as the basis of religion — and not merely of theology. Thus Kaplan writes, "The metaphysical conception of God, which depends upon one's ideas of ultimate reality *is not, or should not be*, the subject matter of religion" [*A New Zionism*, p. 114, italics mine]. This position, which points toward what I believe to be a crucial weakness in humanism, both religious and secular, is discussed in my book, *A Faith For Moderns*, revised and augmented edition [New York: (Bloch Publishing Co., 1971), chapter 13] — R.G.).

The question must be raised at this point whether Kaplan, here and elsewhere, is to be understood as saying that the foundation of faith is exempt from the kind of reasonable verification procedures which bring to conclusion a particular quest for certainty while remaining open to revision, even disavowal, under pressure of new evidence. Does "not susceptible of proof" imply the equal dignity before the judgment of faith of any hypothesis or proposition or hunch or wild guess whatsoever? In "The God Idea in Judaism" Kaplan explained that all ideals rest on the assumption that "there exists in reality that which, if we can discover it, assures their realization." Discovery may be attempted in vain, and this or that ideal may have to be abandoned as illusory. "But we can never abandon all ideals," because we cannot cease believing "that whatever ought to be can be, and ultimately will be, realized."⁸

The conclusion seems inevitable that, according to Kaplan, while all ideals are hypothetical, ideals in the aggregate are less hypothetical than is any particular one. This means that underlying the aggregate is an hypothesis so warranted or so grounded in the rock of solid fact that upon it the Jewish People may in full confidence rebuild its civilization.

Again, what warrant does Kaplan's hypothesis of faith present, in addition to forceful and often repeated enunciation? To be sure, as the thrice-published paper on the God idea insists, it is not grounded in "mathematically-logically demonstrated knowledge" but "in enthusiasm for living, in the passion to surmount limitations, a passion which is uniquely human," an enthusiasm which is "man's will to live the maximum life."⁹

Now it begins to become clear that Kaplan intends no license for all manner of "enthusiasm." To begin with, restraint is imposed by practical meanings and means of "the maximum life" or salvation, whether individual or social. More fundamentally, enthusiasm and passion to surmount limitations are not only entirely compatible with the life of reason but they depend on it as their most reliable means of implementation. Kaplan's text makes plain the recognition that emotion, enthusiasm, and the will to believe in the possibility of salvation rule mightily over man's energies and have priority in evolution-time over the younger capacity of thought. But there is nothing in the text which justifies on its authority an opening of the floodgates of mystical *Schwärmerei*, ecstasy, or "experience." These are properly reported as actual events which shatter, quicken, or set aglow particular human biographies, but they are improperly announced as events in the "biography" of being itself or as events induced or "granted" by God Who thus favored chosen reporters.

8. *The Jewish Reconstructionist Papers*, p. 96; *The Meaning of God*, p. 323. Relevant to this point is Jack J. Cohen's interpretation of Steinberg's notion of God not only as Power "but as 'Mind'" (Cohen, *Op. cit.*, pp. 94-96 and Steinberg, *Anatomy*, p. 106).

9. *The Jewish Reconstructionist Papers*, p. 98; *The Meaning of God*, p. 327. See also Meir Ben-Horin, "Mordecai M. Kaplan's Soterics: Individuality and the Social Order," *Journal of Reform Judaism*, XXVII, 2 (Spring 1980): 12-29.

"Intelligence," in Kaplan's view, "does not preclude either intuition or mysticism, but intuition should not be confused with supernatural revelation, nor mysticism with intellectual surrender." He included religion, therefore, within the scope of scientific thinking, *i.e.*,

the application of intelligence to everything within the range of human experience, including ends as well as means, social and spiritual life as well as physical existence. So understood, it is to the interest of religion to submit itself to the scientific approach.¹⁰

"Mysticism," in one of Kaplan's epigrams, "belongs to the twilight region between magic and poetry. We philosophize with our brain and mysticize with our viscera."¹¹ At best, "mysticism is a philosophy expressed in metaphors which can give assurance but not enlightenment. But it is precisely enlightenment that we need."¹² A distinction, then, must be made between normal and abnormal mysticism. The former denotes "consciousness of the vastness and wonder of the world and of the gap between man's reach and his grasp." It expresses itself in "a sense of identity between the human person and the universal process of organicity or God." The latter, on the other hand, "tends to circumvent the communion between the human person and God by eliminating the long and intricate natural steps to arrive at the feeling of oneness." Hence, maturity in religion evolves not from sudden shudders and tremors but from "the untrammelled functioning of reason, intelligence, and love."¹³

What, finally, is the warrant which Kaplan's faith-hypothesis carries? If it can be securely anchored neither in rational demonstration nor in mystical illumination or "shudder,"¹⁴ what does keep it from drifting in no-mind's land? What permits the hyphenation of faith and hypothesis, of faith as certainty and of hypothesis as pressing curiosity and as open possibility¹⁵ which guides the quest for certainty but does not pre-establish it?

10. *Judaism as a Civilization*, pp. 308, 307.

11. *Not So Random Thoughts* (New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1966) p. 193.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 195; 194.

13. *The Religion of Ethical Nationhood*, p. 88. By contrast, Abraham J. Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Young, 1951), p. 78, rhapsodized: "A tremor seizes our limbs; our nerves are struck, quiver like strings; our whole being bursts into shudders. But then a cry, wrested from our very core, fills the world around us, as if a mountain were suddenly about to place itself in front of us. It is one word: GOD. . . . The word that means more than universe, more than eternity, holy, holy, holy; we cannot comprehend it."

14. Yehzekel Kaufmann, in *The Religion of Israel from Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile*, tr. and abr. by Moshe Greenberg (University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 100f., noted that, in the Israelite conception, "ecstasy does not induce prophecy; to the contrary, the divine word may cause ecstasy. The word of God is not brought on by the spirit, the spirit is the by-product of the word. Frenzy never is represented as a preliminary to prophecy. . . . Israelite prophecy never sought apotheosis (or enthusiasm) and so never attached itself to ecstasy, though not dogmatically hostile towards it. . . . Thus was the pagan Dionysiac element transmuted by Israelite religion."

15. "Philosophy in America has been characteristically open-minded, receptive to novelties of thought and statement, as well as to the general sense that we live in an unfinished universe and can, therefore, produce no finished philosophy" (Joseph L. Blau, "The North American as Philosopher," in Yervant H. Krikorian, ed., *Naturalism and the Human Spirit*

The answer, I suggest, lies in the hyphen itself. Hypothesis is faith-in-the-making; faith is hypothesis consolidating its gains. Without faith in the worthwhileness of hypothesis, to what end engage in the pursuit of verification for its claim? Without hypothesis fearlessly and zealously pursued, what noble daring and risking can sustain persistent faith? In Kaplan's functionalist transnaturalism, faith is present in hypothesis and hypothesis in faith. Neither overwhelms the other. Both are functions of the living and creating mind. Powered by the "passion to surmount limitations," that is, to transcend the unredeemed given, the one works to save the other from plunging into the fog which is called "the leap of faith," while the other works to encourage the partner as it probes the unknown and invades the unprecedented.

In its basic direction, Kaplan's theology is neither faith-full nor doubt-full. Rather, it places its trust in the creative possibilities of both certainty and doubt. He saw the truly pious "forever wrestling with God in prayer, pleading with Him to assert His justice. . . . *Their very doubt is thus a prayer and an expression of their faith.*" Destructive doubt, to be sure, needs to be distinguished from constructive doubt. The former challenges faith, saying that the world is so constituted that doing right or doing wrong makes no difference. It asks: "How do we know that there is a Power in the world that makes for righteousness?" The latter neither denies nor ignores the reality and grimness of evil. But it does not abdicate in the face of this reality and this grimness. It reflects the eternal refusal of the human spirit to submit to defeatism. "This doubt is capable of becoming a great force for good, for living human life under conditions of open indeterminateness, under the domination of the Power that makes for salvation."¹⁶

Creative doubt, in Kaplan's theology, loosens the stranglehold of the assumption that evil is inevitable and inescapable. Faith implies, if we are

[Columbia University Press, 1959 (1944)], p. 145). See also John E. Smith, *The Spirit of American Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), *passim*. I am suggesting that, in Kaplan's theology, a typically American version of Judaism, neither Judaism nor salvation is a finished product. The following episode is characteristic: In the course of a conversation in his library on November 10, 1971, Rabbi Kaplan presented to me a book by Kurt F. Reinhardt, *The Existential Revolt – The Main Themes and Phases* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publ. Co., 1952). Throughout, the book shows pencil marks and marginal comments by Kaplan. On p. 10 the text reads: "Christianity introduced the dimension of spiritual infinity into this finite universe: it placed history under the dual aspect of eternity and time. The temporal phase of history begins with the divine 'Fiat!', with an act of creation *ex nihilo*; and then the irreversible time current of history moves towards a preordained end, in which time and eternity will again converge." Kaplan underlined the words here emphasized and exclaimed in the margin: "Nonsense."

16. *The Future of the American Jew* (New York: Macmillan, 1948) p. 233. "Certainly one hundred per cent doubt . . . turns advantage into calamity and proves more inimical to thought than the blindest faith: no longer the enabling spur, but only a crippling paralysis. In most cases all that separates such extreme doubt from sheer despair is its more fashionable cut. . . . The real doubter is never so self-assured, for doubt is a thorn; and the *real* sceptic is no agnostic: he seeks to perceive, and cultivates not the theory of ignorance but the theory of knowledge. . . . To err is human, but to doubt is more human" (Ernst Bloch, *A Philosophy of the Future* [New York: Herder, 1970], pp. 12f.).

to read Kaplan as he would wish to be read, the redirection of creative doubt from its rival's notion of the inevitability of evil to the belief in the possibility of good in the world. This redirection is the release of thought and action on behalf of the good as practical possibility, and this release is the function of the faith-hypothesis. Hence, for Kaplan, the call to prayer is not an invitation to climb the ladder of faith to heaven; the call to prayer is the initiation of redemptive acts beyond prayer. In such acts of tangible redemption, doubt is not forcibly silenced or dulled with myth, symbol, pomp, the magic of art, but is decisively answered. In demonstrable redemption from palpable evils, communal and personal, doubt is overcome. Redemption, however, is nothing but a condition of conditions, subject to change, and when doubt, revived by change, again calls for evidence, faith must answer this call or else revise the substance of its profession.

The channeling of creative doubt into creative, deliberately redemptive acts is, I suggest, what Kaplan means by saying that

the torment of a divided mind, fearful both of yielding to doubt and of dismissing it [can be escaped] not by a process of thought but by an act of will.¹⁷ [The] *deliberate focusing on the good confers on our contemplation of the good the power of making us will the abolition of the evil, while our refusal to focus attention on the evil deprives it of that fascination which enables it to inhibit our pursuit of the good.*¹⁸

The point in Kaplan's distinction between thought and will is anything but the replacement of intelligence by willfulness. Rather, it is his way of warning against the idea that thinking, which is a form of action, is sufficient action. Social action requires social thinking, but thinking must come to grips with obstructions outside the mind. Yet the muscle of mind is will. Sidney Hook, addressing his last class at New York University, reaffirmed his belief that intelligence is the central virtue of the moral, "but in the last few years I've come to the conclusion that though there is no substitute for intelligence, it is not enough. I've discovered that people may be intelligent but lack the moral courage to act."¹⁹ Back in 1920,

17. *The Future of the American Jew*, p. 235.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 236.

19. Quoted from *The New York Times*, December 21, 1972. Saul K. Padover, in his chapter on Dewey (*The Genius of America* [New York: MacGraw-Hill, 1960], p. 284), notes the "vein of naivete in so seminal a mind." But I cannot agree that Dewey was the kind of liberal who underemphasizes the will. He was, in fact, concerned to link thought and will, especially "strong will." Impulse, he saw, "provides the drive, while thought supplies consecutiveness, patience and persistence, leading to a unified course of conduct" (*Theory of the Moral Life* [New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960 (1908)], p. 36). Nor was David Ben-Gurion naive when he told an interviewer (Weekly Supplement to *Ha-Aretz*, September 8, 1972, p. 25) that the Egyptians are possibly quite serious about peace with Israel. "Why? Because 120,000 Arabs study today at universities." They will recognize, Ben-Gurion thought, that their real problem is not the destruction of Israel but the improvement of the Egyptian fellahin's lot. "It is impossible that so many young intellectuals would not be able to identify Egypt's real problems." Where, then, is the line which separates keen insight from liberal naivete? Perhaps Hegel should have reenforced his *List der Vernunft*, the cunning of reason, with the cunning of naivete.

Dewey warned that "while saints are engaged in introspection, burly sinners run the world."²⁰

Kaplan stressed thought *and* will, not in order to make thought willful but in order to make it more courageous. To him, belief in God is not, therefore, the speculative outcome of thought pale and sickly for lack of engagements in the arena of clashing social forces and conflicting interests.²¹ Instead, the God-faith is nothing less than

the unitary will to live the life abundant, and to achieve the maximum possibilities for good that inhere in life. Such will is the will to salvation. The belief in God is, accordingly, not a *reasoned* faith, but a *willed* faith in the existence of a Power in the world that furthers man's salvation.

It is a faith willed to derive from reality all that it can give us. But it requires that we use our minds to the fullest. It works only when "we learn to know and understand enough about that reality to be able to conform to its demands."²²

In sum, the faith-hypothesis is supported by creatively doubting intelligence and by intelligence wedded to the will to use it for the comprehensive purpose of achieving the full state of righteousness which is salvation. The faith-hypothesis reflects the will to reconstruction and the faith that the reconstructive life is life examined and life examining, life eminently worthwhile.²³

Does Kaplan's refusal to remain with the tentativeness of hypothesis remove him from the ranks of loyal pragmatists, of experimentalists? Is the hyphenation of hypothesis with faith a pragmatically indefensible concession to idealism?

The same question has been raised by pragmatists themselves when they ask whether definite, positive convictions are permissible in their philosophy. Is a pragmatist entitled to believe "profoundly in the ability of experience to develop its own standards" or in democracy or in treating

20. John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (New York: Mentor Books, 1950 [1920]), p. 154.

21. "... the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market" (Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., "The Best Test of Truth," in *The American Pragmatists*, ed. by Milton R. Konvitz and Gail Kennedy (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1970 [1960], p. 170).

22. *The Future of the American Jew*, p. 182. Steinberg, *Op. cit.*, p. 182, charged that Kaplan's God-faith has its roots in the biological will to live and is not reasoned but willed. Steinberg did not, I think, pay enough attention to the fact that Kaplan draws a clear distinction between the biological will to live and the will to live abundantly and to achieve one's human destiny (*The Future of the American Jew*, pp. 172, 243). There is no conflict here between will and reason nor is there a reduction of faith to biology.

23. Erwin R. Goodenough, *Toward a Mature Faith* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1955), p. 85, put it bluntly in his chapter on faith: "The official attitude of Christianity is *Credo ut intelligam*, I believe in order that I may understand. . . . The attitude of the new age, however, is *Dubito ut intelligam*, I doubt in order to understand." In *The Psychology of Religious Experiences* (New York: Basic Books, 1965), p. 176, he developed his concept of "religion as search" and hailed Einstein as "one of the great pioneers, prophets, of the religion of the quest," the man "of profound reverence for the still-unknown, along with a triumphant faith in the quest and man's intelligence."

individuals as ends? Dewey called on religion to surrender

all commitments to beliefs about matters of fact, whether physical, social or metaphysical [and not to substitute in their place] fixed beliefs about values, save the one value of the worth of discovering the possibilities of the actual and striving to realize them. . . . An idealism of action that is devoted to creation of a future, instead of staking itself upon propositions about the past, is invincible.²⁴

There is, as Childs has pointed out, "something final" about the "one value" in Dewey's passage, or about that one "absolute" in pragmatism.²⁵ But this is not a value selected arbitrarily, "willed" because of an activity called "willing," performed by a "faculty" called "will." Rather, it reflects "recognition of the inherent nature of life itself" which, on the human level, seeks "to participate intelligently in the movement of events . . . so as to secure a differential gain." At any rate, Dewey's "one value" and devotion to "creation of a future," in Childs' view, "may even be said to be the religious attitude of experimentalism."²⁶

Neither firmness of conviction nor a warranted certainty of faith are foreign to pragmatism. Its devotion to experimental method as "practical absolute" is a faith: "By *practical absolute* is meant a belief so verified in experience that its hypothetical character is no longer of sufficient significance to require practical attention."²⁷ And its devotion to democracy is a faith:

It is an hypothesis, but one in which the attitudes and activities of men help create the facts by which its adequacy is to be tested. By acting on this hypothesis we may create the facts which make it true. If we do not have faith to inspire effort in the general direction of democracy, we may make false that which otherwise might have been made true.²⁸

But it must be kept in mind that, in the words of C.I. Lewis:

Neither human experience nor the human mind has a character which is universal, fixed, and absolute. . . . Our categories and definitions are peculiar social products, reached in the light of experiences which have much in common. . . . Conceptions, such as those of logic, which are least likely to be affected by the opening of new ranges of experience, represent the most stable of our categories; but none of them is beyond the possibility of alteration.²⁹

To these "practical absolutes" and malleable stabilities or firm ground amidst swirling events named "nature" also belongs Kaplan's hypothesis of faith. But he was seeking his own way to, or in, pragmatism

24. Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1960 [1929]), p. 304.

25. John L. Childs, *Education and the Philosophy of Experimentalism* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1931), p. 120.

26. Ibid., p. 121. — On possibility, see also, Isidor Chein's observations in ch. 7, "Some Reflections on Reality," of his *The Science of Behavior and the Image of Man* (New York: Basic Books, 1972), esp. pp. 153–58.

27. Childs, *Op. cit.*, p. 123.

28. Ibid., pp. 122f.

29. C.I. Lewis, "A Pragmatic Conception of *A Priori*" in *The American Pragmatists*, p. 314.

by working with an hypothesis about the universe. His “fundamental assumption,” as has been shown, makes bold to assert that the universe “is so constituted as to enable man to achieve salvation.” The “so constituted” then translates quite readily into powers or the sum total of powers and, hence, speaking functionally or operationally, into Matthew Arnold’s “Power not ourselves that makes for righteousness” or into Kaplan’s adaptation, “the Power that makes for salvation.”

* * *

A further development of transnaturalist theology will have to come to terms, I believe, with this question: “Being so constituted” implies an entity which is defined by what it includes and by what it excludes from the confines of its identity. But how legitimate is it to ascribe to “universe” the status of a definable entity in itself? How proper is it to place it, in the last analysis, in the category of containers, of bodies known or knowable by their temporal-spatial dimensions? Is not “the universe” rather an abstract, collective noun whereby language points to the infinity, openness, timelessness and spacelessness and utter “constitutionlessness” of the cosmic environment as we now must see it, think it, intuit it? *Creative doubt* enters here again.

For the next stage in the theological development, of which Kaplan is his century’s most daring pioneer and incomparable guide, a crucial task, it seems to me, is the formulation of an hypothesis of Jewish faith or “fundamental assumption” which expresses the polarity of faith and hypothesis in language which avoids the enormous difficulty of reality being “so constituted” and of the sum total of cosmic powers “making for” man’s salvation. Although a matter of faith, such an hypothesis will have to meet Burt’s requirement of combining decisiveness in action with “unreserved progressiveness.”³⁰ At the same time, it must, of course, reflect Israel’s deepest and most enduring insight into its own existence, into all existence.

In this reformulation of transnaturalism, the central term, I believe, will be *The Promise*, and the central configuration of letters will be what it has been from the earliest days of the Jewish People — *YHWH*.

30. “Perhaps the greatest achievement of character which the world needs is the combination of practical decisiveness in moments requiring it with unreserved intellectual progressiveness. . . . Intelligent action does not require certainty, and this fact itself must be recognized if we would become by grace of science more certain than we are” (Edwin A. Burt, *Religion in an Age of Science* [New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1929], pp. 88f.). In *Judaism as a Civilization*, Kaplan shows how the faith-hypothesis may be tested because it has the verifiability which is a trait of natural experience: “The power to help us orient ourselves to life, to elicit the best of which we are capable and to render us immune to the worst that may befall us is the pragmatic test to validate a conception of God. To that extent at least a God-idea based on experience is analogous to a scientific conclusion, and like it possesses objectivity” (p. 317).

The Transnatural Theology of Mordecai M. Kaplan

WILLIAM E. KAUFMAN

MORDECAI M. KAPLAN'S DISTINCTIVE CONTRIBUTION to Jewish theology is his theory of transnaturalism whose purpose is to set forth a philosophical theology which avoids the pitfalls of both supernaturalism and reductive naturalism. In this essay, we shall trace the reasoning that led Kaplan to the development of transnaturalism and critically evaluate his theory as a contemporary Jewish theological response.

I

To begin, let us examine what Kaplan means by the term "transnaturalism." In his book, *Judaism Without Supernaturalism*, he provides us with his definition of the concept:

Transnaturalism is that extension of naturalism which takes into account much that mechanistic or materialistic or positivist science is incapable of dealing with. Transnaturalism reaches out into the domain where mind, personality, purpose, ideals, values and meanings dwell. It treats of the good and the true. Whether or not it has a distinct logic of its own is problematic. But it certainly has a language of its own, the language of simile, metaphor and poetry. That is the language of symbol, myth and drama. In that universe of discourse, belief in God spells trust in life and in man, as capable of transcending the potentialities for evil that inhere in his animal heredity, in his social heritage, and in the conditions of his environment. Transnaturalist religion beholds God in the fulfillment of human nature and not in the suspension of the natural order. Its function is not to help man overcome the hazards of nature, but to enable him to bring under control his inhumanity to his fellow-man.¹

Kaplan's polemic against supernaturalism, as expressed in the foregoing passage, comes out of his effort to evolve a theory of religion which does not imply the suspension of the natural order. Supernaturalism, as he understands it, is the world view that God is not subject to any empirical law of nature and can, therefore, suspend the natural order at any point in time. And the miracles recorded in Scripture involve, according to Kaplan, precisely this contravention of the laws of nature. Kaplan rejects the historicity of these miracles and the logic of super-

1. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism Without Supernaturalism* (New York: The Reconstructionist Press, 1958), p. 10.

WILLIAM E. KAUFMAN is the rabbi of Congregation Agudas Achim in San Antonio, Texas.

naturalism inherent in the Jewish supernaturalist tradition. He rejects that logic because it is based on what he regards as the assumptions of the unphilosophical mind. Accordingly, he explains:

Natural has a specific meaning which is intended to correct one of the basic assumptions of the unphilosophic mind. It denotes the fact that the action of each thing is conditioned by the law of its own being. That law cannot be altered by any will acting from without. To the unphilosophic or unscientific mind all things appear as being acted upon extraneously by quasi-human wills or a single quasi-human will. Philosophical apologetics aside, God is conceived in Scriptures and in rabbinic literature more or less anthropomorphically. His will, though infinitely superior in power, justice and goodness to that of man, resembles it in the consciousness of the specific purposes it seeks to achieve. From that viewpoint nothing possesses a law of its own being.²

Kaplan's rejection of supernaturalism, therefore, is based on his contention that modern philosophy and science have cumulatively established the autonomy of the natural order. Having repudiated what he considers to be the logic of supernaturalism, why, then, is he not content with a position of strict naturalism?

II

From his definition of transnaturalism, it is clear that strict naturalism is inadequate for Kaplan because he believes that it is incapable of "dealing with" the phenomena of mind, personality, purpose, ideals, values and meanings. What does he mean by "dealing with"? Manifestly, he is seeking a transcendent source of human value precisely because he maintains that a purely naturalistic conceptual framework cannot validate man's virtuous strivings. And it is precisely the need, as Kaplan sees it, for a transcendent foundation for human values that gives rise to his conception of God as the power that makes for salvation:

From the adoption of the frame of human values, which derive their significance from man's striving for salvation, perfection or self-transcendence, it is but one logical step to the belief in God as the Power that impels man to pursue that course and that enables him at least to come within sight of its destination. We experience the reality of God in whatever gives us a sense of life's worthwhileness, despite the evils that mar life, and in whatever drives us to follow our sense of moral responsibility, regardless of consequences.³

A pure naturalist, in striving to account for "values," would view Kaplan's presumed "logical step" to God, as the Power that makes for salvation, to be gratuitous and unnecessary. For example, the scientific naturalist, Ernest Nagel, is content with a purely humanistic framework for values. Thus, he writes:

2. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization* (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), pp. 314, 315.

3. *Judaism Without Supernaturalism*, p. 25.

A mature naturalism seeks to understand what man is, not in terms of a discovered or postulated continuity between what is distinctive of him and what is pervasive of all things. Without denying that even the most distinctive human traits are dependent on things which are non-human, a mature naturalism attempts to assess man's nature in the light of *his* actions and achievements, *his* aspirations and capacities, *his* limitations and tragic failures and *his* splendid works of ingenuity and imagination.⁴

In contrast to Kaplan, Nagel, the pure naturalist, has no need for a cosmic source of value. For him, values are totally immanent and humanistic: *man* is the source of value. Kaplan, however, seeks to ground values in a conception of God, thereby showing his dissatisfaction with strict naturalism.

The problem that now presents itself is the ontological status of Kaplan's idea of God, insofar as it functions as the source of moral values in his philosophy.

III

As early as 1913, Kaplan was preoccupied with the problem of the source of moral imperatives. In an entry in his journal at that time, he explicitly rejected Spinoza's pantheism because of its lack of a source of sanctions outside the natural world. He wrote:

The God of Judaism is one who is above as well as in the world. But his being a God in the world was due to his being a God above the world. The moment God is merely identified with the world and conceived as being immanent but not transcendent, his divinity is denied and he is dissolved into the world. This is the atheism and pantheism which religion so vigorously contends against. It will only verify the analysis we have suggested of the true character of the moral laws and of the "ought," as being derivative from a source of sanctions beyond the social group to which these values are applied, to learn that in a system of logical pantheism such as Spinoza's there is no room for any "ought". That which is, is what ought to be. Religion, while not always clearly recognizing this danger in pantheism, instinctively felt it and has insisted upon the transcendent phase of God being brought into prominence.⁵

In the foregoing passage, the ontological status of "God" is clearly one of transcendence: transcendence of the human mind, the collective mind, and even of the natural world. And Kaplan considered the Divine transcendence to be the authentic source of moral sanctions and values. In his quest to validate man's moral strivings, Kaplan, at this early stage of his development, maintained the necessity for belief in a transcendent God.

But, although the quest for the source of moral values led him in the direction of Divine transcendence, scientific considerations impelled him

4. Ernest Nagel, "Naturalism Reconsidered" in *Essays in Philosophy*, ed. Houston Peterson (New York: Washington Square Press, 1974), p. 490.

5. *Journal of Mordecai M. Kaplan*, Vol I, March 30, 1913, p. 22.

toward a conception of an immanent God. For example, it is of a purely immanent God that he speaks in the following passage:

With the development of scientific techniques for the utilization of natural forces and with the revision of our world-outlook in a way that invalidates the distinction between natural and supernatural, it is only as the sum of everything *in the world* that renders life significant and worthwhile — or holy — that God can be worshipped by man.⁶

Since science allows no room for entities alleged to be transcendent of the natural universe, Kaplan draws the inference of an immanent God. But his quest for a transcendent source to ground man's moral and spiritual strivings drives him to seek some kind of Divine transcendence.

Kaplan attempts to resolve this conflict of immanence and transcendence by his mediating conception of the "trans-natural." Describing his concept of God as the cosmic process that makes for man's salvation, he writes:

As cosmic process, God is more than a physical, chemical, biological, psychological or even social process. God includes them all, but what is distinctive about the God-process is that it is superfactual and superexperiential. Were one to add supernatural, the whole point of this approach would be missed, since the term "supernatural" implies miracle or suspension of natural law. On the other hand, it would be correct to say that *the God-process is "trans-natural."*⁷

The problem here is to determine the precise meaning of "trans-natural." What does the prefix "trans" mean in this instance?

Among the definitions given of "trans" is: "through and through so as to change completely."⁸ This provides the key to the meaning of "trans-natural." It is Kaplan's contention that the term "God" denotes the creative process which transforms the chaos of the universe into an organic whole: "Nature is infinite chaos, with all its evils forever being vanquished by creativity, which is God as infinite goodness."⁹ Clearly, therefore, nature's God, and not nature itself, is the source of value for Kaplan.

How does this trans-natural force of creativity function as the source of moral values? Kaplan places a great deal of emphasis upon the category of wisdom, which he defines as "the sense of values."¹⁰ And he contends that human wisdom is a reflection of Divine wisdom: "the wisdom by which man is expected to control and direct his life reflects the wisdom by which God's laws govern all nature."¹¹

6. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion* (New York: The Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation, 1947), p. 26. Italics added.

7. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *The Future of the American Jew* (New York: The Reconstructionist Press, 1967), p. 183.

8. *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, p. 902.

9. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *The Religion of Ethical Nationhood* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1970), p. 51.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

The wisdom of God's laws is manifested in the polarity of independence and interdependence in nature: "the universal law of polarity whereby everything in the universe, from the minutest electron to the vastest star, is both self-active and interactive, independent and interdependent."¹² It is precisely this model which constitutes, for Kaplan, the goal of man's moral and ethical strivings — namely, the synthesis of independence and inter-dependence. In an essay entitled, "What Is Our Human Destiny?", he explained his conception of how Divinity, operating as the cosmic process of organicity, functions as the supreme goal of man's ethical strivings:

To become fully human, man has to achieve, on a self-conscious level, a process that operates on a non-conscious level, in all living things, namely, the synthesis of individuation and interaction, or of independence and interdependence . . . Accordingly, God as the Power that makes for salvation is the cosmic process of organicity, which, in sub-human creatures, synthesizes individuation and interaction on an unconscious level, and in man, on a conscious level. The function of ethical religion is to translate this idea of God into a way of life that would result in a successful synthesis. Ethical religion is thus a means to character building.¹³

Kaplan recognizes the fact that human self-consciousness has its dangers as well as its advantages.¹⁴ Excessive self-consciousness can generate marked introspection and isolate man from his fellow human beings. But the integrative capacity of man's self-consciousness, by making human beings aware of their inter-dependence and need for interaction, can raise man "to the level of the divine."¹⁵ This integrative capacity functions as the sense of responsibility in man. And the source of this value is the operation of God as the creative process of organicity and reciprocity: "The universal reciprocity which functions as nature's God should become manifest in the moral responsibility of men and nations through commitment to ethical nationhood."¹⁶

By arguing that universal reciprocity should become manifest in human moral responsibility, has Kaplan involved himself in the notorious difficulty of deriving normative propositions from factual statements? Kaplan recognizes that "it is a long established truth that the 'ought' cannot be derived from the 'is.'"¹⁷ He further states categorically that "the term 'God' does not belong to the category of objective facts which are the subject matter of reason and intelligence. It belongs to the category of values which, as spiritual factors, are the subject matter of wisdom."¹⁸ This

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 34, 35.

13. Mordecai M. Kaplan, "What Is Our Human Destiny?", *JUDAISM*, 2, No. 3 (July, 1953): 199.

14. *Ibid.*: 199, 200.

15. *Ibid.*: 201.

16. *The Religion of Ethical Nationhood*, p. 50.

17. Mordecai M. Kaplan, "Reply to Marc A. Triebwasser," *Reconstructionist*, 36 (December 4, 1970): 14.

18. *The Religion of Ethical Nationhood*, p. 48.

does not mean, however, that values are not real. Emphatically, Kaplan contends that values are as real as facts:

Values, though invisible and intangible, are as real as visible and tangible facts or realities. As psychic and social facts or realities, values are far more potent as fact makers or factors, in the sense of producing results. The God concept, properly understood as a factor in ordering the life of men and nations, is the most potent and creative factor in human existence.¹⁹

Kaplan's preoccupation with values enables us to understand the reasoning underlying his theory of transnaturalism. For him, God is the Power that makes for salvation: the correlative of what we understand by human self-fulfillment or salvation. Since human salvation is synonymous with the good life, Kaplan's aim, as a philosopher, is "to posit a conception of God from which the good life follows as logically as the fact that the three angles of a triangle equal two right angles."²⁰ Unable to accept supernaturalism, Kaplan cannot base the good life on a theory of revelation. Aware of the difficulties of deriving normative statements from factual propositions and dissatisfied with the mechanistic implications of strict naturalism, Kaplan cannot base the good life on nature alone. He seeks, therefore, a mediating position between naturalism and supernaturalism which he designates as transnaturalism. According to the logic of transnaturalism, not nature but nature's God, understood as the creative process manifested in universal organicity and reciprocity, is the source of moral value. But the problem that presents itself again is the ontological status of this concept of God, or, to use a familiar phrase, the existence of God.

IV

The crucial issue in a critical evaluation of Kaplan's transnaturalism is precisely the ontological status of his God-concept. Emphatically, Kaplan has stated that the concept of God belongs in the category of values and not of facts. Yet, repeatedly, he refers to God as "creativity," or "the creative process" which manifests itself within nature as the principle of polarity or organicity. When he writes in this fashion he is characterizing nature in descriptive terms and is making metaphysical assertions about "the way things are." Apparently, therefore, Kaplan's concept of God appears to be self-contradictory (the contradiction arising because of Kaplan's oscillation between descriptive and normative categories). Is this contradiction only apparent or is it an actual and decisive weakness in his theological system?

The clue to an answer to this problem can be found in Kaplan's definition of transnaturalism. In his definition, he stated that transnaturalism "reaches out into the domain where mind, personality, pur-

19. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

20. "What Is Our Human Destiny?" p. 200.

pose, ideals, values and meanings dwell.”²¹ I understand Kaplan to be asserting here that there is a real ontological dimension, which transcends man, yet which generates man’s highest qualities: mind, personality, purpose, ideals, values and meanings. My argument is as follows:

1) Kaplan categorically rejects “mechanistic or materialistic or positivistic science.”²² Hence, he repudiates the view that mind is merely an epi-phenomenon arising accidentally in the course of evolution. Utilizing the concept of *emergent* evolution, Kaplan affirms that mind and value evolve because they are intrinsic to the structure of the universe.

2) Kaplan states that values, though invisible or intangible, are as real as visible and tangible facts or realities.

3) Kaplan accepts Samuel Alexander’s theory that there exists an ontological reality greater than mind yet generative of mind: “There is nothing in mind which requires us to stop and say, this is the highest empirical quality which time can produce from now throughout the infinite time to come. It is only the highest empirical quality which we who are minds happen to know.”²³

4) Therefore, Kaplan affirms a real level of existence, greater than man, which is at once the source and goal of man’s moral and ethical striving. In his own words, “nature’s God directs the affairs of men to effect the metamorphosis of the human species”²⁴ (i.e., man is destined to become a higher type of being than what he is).

Kaplan’s theory of transnaturalism bears some striking resemblances to Aristotelianism. When Aristotle posited an “active intellect” — a cosmic mind that illuminates man’s “passive intellect,” his capacity to know — he was recognizing the limitations of a purely naturalistic theory of knowing. He was acknowledging the fact that mind is not alien to the universe, that mind is not a kind of cosmic accident: “It is rather a natural and inevitable development in a universe with the character ours displays, reaching its highest actualization in the minds of men.”²⁵ Thus, in his attempt to explain “mind,” Aristotle fell back on a Platonic metaphor.²⁶ Moreover, for Aristotle, “God is the form of the world’s matter . . . God is immanent in the world as its intelligible order, and transcends the world as its ideal end.”²⁷

In marked affinity to Aristotle, Kaplan recognizes the difficulty involved in explaining mind and human values naturalistically. He falls back upon a Platonic metaphor, when he speaks of “*the domain where*

21. *Judaism Without Supernaturalism*, p. 10.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *The Religion of Ethical Nationhood*, p. 111.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 113. It is interesting to note in this passage how transnaturalism is parasitic on supernaturalism for its meaning.

25. John Herman Randall, *Aristotle* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), p. 105.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 105. See also Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book 12, Chapter 7 in Richard McKeon, *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: Random House, 1941), pp. 880, 881.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

mind, personality, purpose, ideals, values and meanings dwell.”²⁸

Furthermore, just as for Aristotle “God” is the form of the world’s matter, “God” for Kaplan is creativity conquering chaos. Finally, for Kaplan, as for Aristotle, God is immanent in the world as its intelligible order — manifested in organicity and polarity — and transcendent as its ideal end, i.e., the direction or *telos* of Kaplan’s creative process.

The major problem that emerges from this examination of Kaplan’s theology is his rejection of *creatio ex nihilo*. Kaplan is thoroughly Aristotelian in his dualism of creativity and chaos, which parallels Aristotle’s dualism of form and matter. Unlike Maimonides, who broke with Aristotle on the problem of creation, Kaplan shows more affinity with Greek hylomorphism than with Biblical creationism. Kaplan’s reasoning on this point is Kantian: he maintains that the human mind simply cannot conceive of ultimate beginnings.²⁹ Yet, surely, a God who creates *ex nihilo* would offer a more secure foundation for moral values than Kaplan’s transnatural Deity; for if chaos is co-eternal with God, we live in a Manichaean universe with no ultimate unifying source of being and meaning.

As a contemporary theological response, therefore, Kaplan’s effort to steer a middle course between supernaturalism and naturalism marks a movement toward an interesting neo-Aristotelian type of philosophical theology. But as a Jewish response, Kaplan’s transnaturalism is inconsistent with a metaphysical principle fundamental to Judaism: the belief in God’s creation of the world, and not merely His creativity. Kaplan is, of course, correct in his claim that the human mind cannot fathom ultimate beginnings. It is at this point that some kind of metaphysical faith must enter in to supplement human reasoning. But the distinguishing feature of Mordecai Kaplan as a Jewish theologian is his willingness to follow his reasoning wherever it leads, even if the result is a closer affinity to Aristotle than to the Hebrew Bible.

28. *Judaism Without Supernaturalism*, p. 10. Italics added.

29. *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion*, p. 61.

Judaism – A Civilization

ELIEZER BERKOVITS

ALTHOUGH I AM THE AUTHOR OF THE ONLY comprehensive critique of Professor Kaplan's philosophy of "Trans-naturalism" and Reconstructionism, I have willingly accepted the invitation of the editor of JUDAISM to contribute an article to this issue in honor of Mordecai M. Kaplan's hundredth birthday. Even in disagreement one readily acknowledges him as one of the outstanding personalities in American Jewry, whose influence has been felt strongly for several generations.

On this occasion it is logical for me to turn to his major work, *Judaism as a Civilization*. In it he gives most sustained expression to the major concern of his life's work, i.e., the problem of the threatening erosion of Judaism and, with it, the disintegration of American Jewry in the conditions of modern civilization. The problem is how to adjust to these new conditions meaningfully and creatively. While this writer is unable to accept Kaplan's views on Reconstruction, he is mostly in agreement with him in his criticism of the various ideologies that in the post-emancipation period attempted to deal with the problem of adjustment. According to Kaplan, Reformism is essentially a form of religious philosophy best suited for a small circle of intellectuals. One of his sharpest barbs against it is his criticism of its educational program. He writes:

The real test of any religion, movement or civilization is in the process of education to which it gives rise. If that process is rich in content, colorful and stirring, the movement or religion which it transmits is answering a real need, and is bound to live. But when it is as thin, meager and unappealing as the process of religious training identified with Reformist Judaism, there can be no doubt that the movement is a mistake. The traditional "four ells of the law" represented a lifelong educational process. Reformist Judaism has not enough content to occupy young children for a few years, sixty hours a year . . .¹

The most orthodox of educators will agree with this comment which, of course, has general validity and applies not only to Reform Judaism. His criticism of Conservatism, be it "right wing of Reformism" or "left wing of Neo-Orthodoxy" is equally severe. "There is little to choose" (he maintains), "between Conservatism which is a timid Reformism and Conservatism which is a tepid Orthodoxy."² Mordecai Kaplan is neither timid, nor is his style tepid. Of course, he does not spare Neo-Orthodoxy

1. *Judaism as a Civilization*, (N.Y.: The Reconstructionist Press, 1957 ed.), p. 124.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

ELIEZER BERKOVITS was formerly chairman of the department of Jewish philosophy at The Hebrew Theological College, Skokie, Illinois. He is now living in Jerusalem.

either. He recognizes the boldness of Neo-Orthodoxy in taking up the challenge of the *Zeitgeist*, but its interpretation of that *Zeitgeist* is nothing but "an adversary of straw." Neo-Orthodoxy has not truly represented the "spirit of the time" and has, therefore, not faced it at all, so far as the intellectual challenge is concerned.³ There is certainly a high degree of validity in this criticism. Having received a great part of my education in Germany, I am deeply indebted to the Neo-Orthodox school of thought of Hirsch, Hildesheimer and Hoffman. Yet, there are certain passages in Hirsch's *Nineteen Letters* which always aroused my strongest objections, and I cannot but be in full agreement with Kaplan's criticism of them. They deal with Hirsch's interpretation of the meaning of the *galut*. According to Hirsch, the exile was not only punishment, but part of God's plan for Israel. The loss of country taught the Jewish people to realize that wealth and power are of passing significance, and protected them against too deep an involvement in the pursuit of worldly aims. "The dispersion opened a new, great and wide-extended field for the fulfillment of its mission . . . Israel has accomplished its task better in exile than in the full possession of good fortune." In the emancipation Hirsch saw the great opportunity to teach the world, by example, the truth and the grandeur of life lived in accordance with the Torah.⁴ There seems to be little difference here between the position of Reform Judaism and that of Neo-Orthodoxy. (However, one should not fail to note here that Kaplan criticizes, essentially, nineteenth century Neo-Orthodoxy and Reformism. He fails to take notice of the important changes that have taken place in this generation in the ideologies of both.)

This question of the meaning of the *galut* leads to what to us appears to be the most important point in Kaplan's criticism and to the affirmation that is the basis of his entire philosophy of Judaism. We are introduced to it by the first sentence with which the chapter "Judaism as a Civilization" opens. It reads as follows: "The versions of Judaism which have thus far been reviewed hold in common the assumption that Jews differ from non-Jews essentially in matters of religion."⁵ The truth is, however, that Jews are not merely a religious congregation, but a nation; and Judaism is not only a religion, but a civilization. One cannot but wholeheartedly agree with this statement. In fact, for those of us whose origins are in Eastern European Jewish communities, this is a truth that needs no explicit confirmation. Kaplan describes the unity of the Jewish people most impressively in the words:

The remarkable uniformity in all matters pertaining to Jewish life that prevailed within the various Jewries and the unparalleled discipline and obedience to authority that obtained everywhere among the Jews, made of them a nation in a truer sense than were those who lived in one country under their own government.⁶

3. Ibid., p. 154.

4. Ibid., p. 149.

5. Ibid., p. 173.

6. Ibid., p. 189.

One ought to tone down the somewhat forbidding-sounding phrase "in obedience to authority." The discipline was freely accepted and, therefore, "obedience to authority" was obeying one's own conscience that acknowledged the truth value of the divine commandments.

Before Kaplan, Franz Rosenzweig wrote in a very similar sense about the meaning of the *am ehad*, the uniquely one people in the history of the human race. Since Israel is eminently a nation, Judaism is, in its very essence, a civilization; moreover, a civilization in which the religious and the national elements coincide. Kaplan is even able to affirm that Jewish civilization — apart from a very few other types — is unique "in deriving both religious and national sanctions from one and the same historic background, and that altogether its own." In all this one is in full agreement with him. He is right in his diagnosis that Judaism can meet the challenge of the post-emancipation period only by the preservation and continuation of a vibrant Jewish civilization. Only Jewish civilization can heal "the irrelevance, remoteness and vacuity" of present-day Jewish life. It would be more correct to say not that Jewish life is irrelevant, remote and vacuous, but that Jewish life as Jewish civilization hardly exists for the majority of the American Jews. And here we arrive at the crux of the problem: on the one hand, the flood of disintegration must be stemmed by a renascent Jewish civilization. On the other, that civilization has to adjust itself to the conditions and circumstances in which Jews live in their countries of adoption. But how is the adjustment to be brought about? Kaplan correctly affirms that one of the criteria of the right answer to our question — and one must assume, the basic one — is the requirement that "the adjustment proceeds from the essential nature of Judaism."⁷

There is no need to enter here into a discussion of what constitutes the essential nature of Judaism. Kaplan is right in saying that Jewish life is "a unique way of experience," and, therefore, it needs no further justification. Thus, the question of "why be a Jew" loses its relevance. "All this is correct wherever Jewish life does exist as a "unique way of collective self-expression," e.g., in New Square in the United States, in Meah Sh'arim in Jerusalem, in the Hasidic communities all over the world. The problem in America is, as in many other parts of the Western world, that Jewish life as a unique collective experience and self-expression has been largely eroded. Kaplan calls his approach to Judaism by way of its unique civilization "intuitional." I am afraid that the problem has to be defined much more sharply. The adjustment to the new conditions has to proceed from "the essential nature of Judaism." The method is to be "the intuitional approach." True! Unfortunately, because of the widespread alienation from "the essential nature of Judaism" or, shall we say, because of the Jewish vacuum where Jewish civilization ought to exist as a unique form of collective self-expression, the "intuitional approach" has also dried up.

How serious the nature of the problem is one appreciates best as one

7. Ibid., p. 184.

contemplates the varied chances that Judaism has to be lived as a civilization. In its most normal and natural form, Jewish civilization may prosper in the State of Israel. There the Jewish people live in complete national autonomy, in control of the economic, political, social and cultural realities of their every-day existence. All of this is necessary for the total development of the potentials of any civilization. Such a comprehensive form of Judaism is impossible in a country like the United States. There, "Judaism can survive only as a subordinate civilization." Because of that, Kaplan argues for "the moral and spiritual right to cultural hyphenism." Of course, American Jewry does have that right. The question is: to what extent does it exercise it and how is it going to make use of it in the future? If Judaism may be lived in America only "as a subordinate civilization," can it survive there at all in any significant and meaningful way? How much sacrifice is a human being prepared to take upon himself for a subordinate civilization? The "intuitive approach" can be of not much help in such a situation. Kaplan is right in emphasizing the importance of intuition. Some of the deepest human insights originate in intuition; it is also the source of vital human decisions and commitments. But intuition on behalf of a subordinate civilization would have to be put on a leash. In other words, to the extent that it is still present in the mass of alienated Jews, to call it into action for the sake of a "subordinate civilization" would be choking it into extinction.

In 1980 one reads with nostalgia Kaplan's *Judaism as a Civilization*, which was first published in 1934. It is the intellectual and spiritual child of a world which no longer exists. One is especially struck by this feeling as one reads what he has to say about "the second zone of Jewish life" — the first being Israel and the third, America. Of that zone he maintains that it

will extend over those countries where they (i.e., the Jews) are granted the right of a culturally autonomous minority people. There it ought to be possible to live Judaism to the same degree that one lives the civilization of the majority Survival of Judaism in those countries must, therefore, mean survival of the civilization of the Jew on the basis co-ordinate with the native civilization.⁹

Which are those countries? They are listed (in the 1957 edition) as Poland, Rumania, Czecho-Slovakia. And a few more might have been added. Nothing could impress upon the reader with greater intensity the realization that the work is the product of its time. No one should blame Kaplan for that. Kaplan is right; Judaism is a civilization, a religious civilization. However, the nineteenth century, with whose intellectual equipment he diagnosed the problem and suggested its solution, did not blossom into the twentieth. Not long after *Judaism as a Civilization* was published, the nineteenth century perished in the misery, cruelty, bloodshed and suffering of our era. The "Modern Ideology," as Kaplan and his age understood

8. Ibid., p. 216.

9. Ibid.

it, has failed. Which serious thinker will agree today that "the most reliable method of ascertaining the truth concerning all matters of human interest "was the scientific approach?" In the light of our knowledge and experience today, one would rather say that, about the most vital interests of man, especially those that are related to the very meaning of human existence, science is silent. Kaplan was right when he wrote that the traditional idea of God did not square "with the present day emphasis upon man as the standard of values." That, indeed, was "the present day emphasis" as was the fact of the nineteenth century's unlimited trust in reason and confidence in man. "Man as a standard of values" is, indeed, an adequate explanation both of the Holocaust, accompanied by the encouraging indifference of Western Civilization, and of the meaning of the Gulag Archipelago, to mention only two of the remarkable features of the present day emphasis. All this has to be taken into consideration as one struggles with the problem of Jewish survival.

In defining the uniqueness of Jewish civilization, Kaplan explains the "notion of difference." "To be different may mean to be both other and unlike, or, to be other only."¹⁰ He castigates the attempts to save Judaism by emphasizing religious unlikeness; difference as otherness, not unlikeness, in our collective experience and self-expression alone can save us. It is exactly what we have been trying to do in Israel. It is Kaplan's "first zone" for Jewish living. Zionism, in search of Kaplan's "worldly salvation," has been attempting to build a total Jewish civilization of "otherness," different from others but not unlike them; a nation like all the others. In our days it is becoming increasingly evident that the success of the experiment is more than questionable. Kaplan writes with great conviction of the Zionist movement that "has brought about a renaissance in Jewish thought and activity and has helped to render Jewish life creative."¹¹ This, too, was true when there still lived a generation, not necessarily religious, that had inherited from the past a rich reserve of "intuitional" health. Today, however, it would seem that the effort to be a "normal" nation, with a civilization of "otherness," has exhausted those reserves. Especially in America, a generation that has learned from logical positivism that the ultimate truth of the scientific method is that values are matters of private taste, that has tasted the validity of the existentialist insight that life is absurd, that has been disabused of all the rationalistic optimism of the nineteenth century in the future of man, will not be tempted by any programs to reconstruct Judaism as a subordinate civilization of mere "otherness." If there is today a certain return to Judaism, it is mainly due to the fact that many young people have found in it a total way of life, not only different, but unlike the civilization around them that has lost its charm, its dignity, and its truth value for them. One does not commit oneself to "otherness," but only to "unlikeness."

10. Ibid., p. 177

11. Ibid., p. 174.

However, the phenomenon of *t'shuvah* that we are witnessing in America, as well as in Israel, is not yet a solution to the problem of Jewish disintegration, a problem which today is probably even more serious than it was in the twenties and thirties. We may well adopt Kaplan's warning to our own time: "Never were Jews so much in need of taking thought as they are today." In our search for a solution, we may also agree with him "that the Jews who represent the most vital and promising element in Jewry today are those to whom Judaism is a problem." I would expand that statement, and add: to whom not only Judaism but also, the "spirit of the time" is a problem. My main objection to Kaplan's position is that whilst he rightly subjected the various forms of post-emancipation "theology" to severe criticism, he bowed uncritically to the dictates of the *Zeitgeist*.

His lasting contribution I see in his emphasis on Judaism as the civilization of a people and not merely the religion of a sect. In fact, instead of *Judaism as a Civilization*, I would rather read, *Judaism — A Civilization*. Judaism is nothing else but the unique civilization of a unique people. As we struggle and search for a solution to the problem of Jewish survival, the motto, Judaism — A Civilization, must be the criterion. Any kind of philosophy or theology, any kind of program that does not affirm, sustain, and enhance Jewish civilization is non-authentic and will ultimately exacerbate the problem of Jewish survival. Judaism — A Civilization imposes upon the Jewish people the primary concern with Jewish renewal in the state of Israel, preferably through active participation in the task by means of *aliyah*. Finally, the precondition for Jewish civilization is oneness of the Jewish people as a nation. We have to recognize each other. We must not allow Judaism to degenerate into sectarianism.

Though in disagreement with his Reconstructionist ideology, I am grateful to Mordecai Kaplan for the example that he set us by the intellectual honesty with which he analyzed the problem of Jewish existence in modern times and for the spiritual integrity and moral courage with which he sought for a solution.

Kaplan and Jewish Law

SEYMOUR SIEGEL

AS IN SO MANY OTHER AREAS OF JEWISH life and thought, Professor Mordecai Kaplan has made an invaluable contribution to the discussion of the role and future of Jewish law. Over the years, he has made far-reaching suggestions, many of which have been adopted by the various wings of Judaism, though his contributions have not always been acknowledged. It is, therefore, a privilege for me to participate in this tribute to a great teacher and a great innovator.

Kaplan is critical of all of the existing approaches to Jewish law within the Jewish community.

The Orthodox view, he maintains, regards the *halakhah* "as supernaturally revealed and unalterable, except through some subsequent revelation," and it is, therefore, built on unacceptable intellectual foundations. The history of Jewish law yields the unmistakable conclusion that Jewish practices have differed over the centuries and that to make the claim that the whole corpus of *halakhah* is unchangeable is to fly in the face of the evidence so painstakingly assembled by the scholars of Judaism, especially in the last one hundred and fifty years.

Reform, according to Kaplan, "regards it (that is, Jewish law) as a product of historical evolution and as having lost its function as a result of the Emancipation." In the eyes of Reform, "Jewish religion in our day requires no legal prospects; ethical principles suffice as guides to Jewish behavior." Such an approach is not acceptable since *halakhah* has its own values. Jewish life is grievously impoverished when the regimen of observances and rituals is eliminated.

Both Orthodoxy and Reform, in Kaplan's eyes, "are therefore inadequate in reference to Jewish law." However, they are, at least, consistent and clearly defined.

Kaplan is most critical when he turns to Conservative Judaism, where he has been so important a guide for almost three quarters of a century. Conservatism rejects the assumption of an unchanging law and an unnecessary law. "Yet it has not arrived at a definite understanding concerning the place of Jewish law in Jewish religion and Jewish life."

Conservatism is motivated by two principles which are of crucial importance. It has based allegiance to Jewish law not on supernatural revelation but on the obligation of Jews to express their religious sentiments and belief in a characteristically Jewish way. If a Jew wishes to live as a Jew he must follow the Jewish way, that is, the way of *halakhah*. Professor

SEYMOUR SIEGEL is professor of ethics and theology at The Jewish Theological Seminary of America and chairman, Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of The Rabbinical Assembly of America.

Louis Ginzberg, one of the great personalities in the history of Conservative Judaism, explaining the views of Zacharias Frankel, the intellectual father of the movement, said:

The Law is active religiousness, and in active religion must lie what is specifically Jewish The Law is the form in which the Jewish spirit . . . [satisfies its needs for] a material expression of its religious ideas

The other important principle of Conservative Judaism is that the continuity of Jewish history must be preserved. There can be changes, but they must conform to the spirit and the organic integrity of the Jewish people. This is a basically conservative outlook (in the Burkean sense) which seeks to guide change so that it will do no violence to the historical continuity of the community.

In Kaplan's view, these two principles are praiseworthy. But he is critical of the institutions of the Conservative movement because they have refused to carry out the implications of the principles upon which their philosophy has been based. He sarcastically defines "conservative" as "one who does not believe in doing a thing for the first time. It is a compromise between wishing to stand still and being afraid to go forward." Though he was raised and nurtured in the Conservative movement and was a professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary for half a century, Kaplan is particularly hard on it. He has a keen sense of disappointment at what he considers the poor performance of the movement to which he is obviously emotionally and intellectually attached. Later in the discussion we will see whether he has been altogether fair in his negative evaluation.

He begins his discussion of the "problem of Jewish law" with an analysis of the role of law in general. It should be noted that he prefers the term "Jewish law" in referring to the system of Jewish observances, and almost never uses the terms *halakhah* or *mizvot* in his discussions of this problem.

In any society, according to Kaplan, law functions as the expression of the collective will of a community. It concretizes its moral sense, seeks to further the values held sacred by it and, of course, serves to regulate human conduct. But it loses its sense as law if there are no sanctions to enforce it.

Jewish society, in its pre-Emancipation phase, exhibited all of the prerequisites for law-making. The law expressed the collective recognition that it was supernaturally ordained and was accompanied by the imposition of sanctions for those who disobeyed it. But modern Jewry, especially in the Diaspora, has none of the characteristics which can serve to regenerate Jewish law. There is no definite communal structure. There is no generally accepted ideology concerning the origins and ultimate sanctions for the law. Kaplan believes, therefore, that the reconstitution of the Jewish people — its reconstruction — is a prime requisite for the revival of Jewish law. Nothing less than a thorough reconsideration of the

status of Jews will do; tinkering here and there with the received law will not do.

What must be done is to create, in the Diaspora, an organic Jewish community which would "constitute itself as an organized body, for the purpose of satisfying the Jewish needs common to all its members." This body would be democratic and, like all democratic groups, would create and enforce its law in response to the will of the majority. Jewish law in this way would not be imposed by a supernatural source; it would be the self-imposed law of a voluntarist community.

The first task would be to create a kind of "constitutional law." There would be requirements and obligations of membership; an enumeration of the duties and prerogatives of the Jewish civil service, such as rabbis, administrators and educators, and the levying of taxes upon the members of the community to support communal institutions. This kind of assembly would resemble the organic communities which existed in pre-war central Europe and which still exist, to an extent, in Latin America.

The organic community would then turn to defining and recommending the specific structure of Jewish law in domestic relations and ritual. These would be in line with the historical continuity of Jewish life, but they would be evaluated in the light of new insights and values. Specifically, the laws would have to contribute to the happiness and well-being of the members of the community. In line with Kaplan's view of God as "the Power that makes for salvation," it would be possible to use that terminology even for Jewish law. If the law contributes to the "salvation" of the individuals then it can be said to be "divine."

What Kaplan proposes is something totally different from what we now have. The whole corpus of Jewish law would be evaluated by a democratically constituted body which would draw up codes of observance applicable to its members. In certain areas, such as those defining the communal institutions, the regulations would be binding upon all those who wish to be members. In certain other areas, such as ritual observance, there would be a wide spectrum of behavior, dependent upon the predilections and outlooks of those in the group. There would be room, as well, for the orthodox and traditional, who would constitute a sub-group within the larger one and for whom ritual observance would be a more intense part of their Jewish lives. The assembly would legislate new laws and abrogate old ones. It could decide what sanctions to impose upon the members for non-compliance.

This grand scheme would result in a Jewish community organically constituted, with room for diversions and differences, but united in the will to make Judaism relevant and contributing to the happiness and well-being of the individual members.

In the light of our experience since Professor Kaplan first proposed this idea, it seems almost utopian to believe that in a fragmented Jewish community there could be much agreement to participate in the scheme. The vision is convincing; the reality seems recalcitrant.

What seems of permanent value to all Jews today is the challenge to reformulate reasons for observance that are different from the fundamentalist view that all of Jewish law was handed down by a supernatural power. More than anything else, Kaplan has confronted the traditionalists with the need to consider specific areas of Jewish law that are patently unethical or are unsuited to the modern ethical conceptions which are at the base of our outlook of right and wrong.

Professor Kaplan has been the most vigorous exponent of reforming traditional Jewish law for women. Now that even the Orthodox seem to be aware that the inherited traditions will not do, it is important to point out that decades ago it was Kaplan who enunciated the problem. "The Jewish woman must demand the equality due her as a right to which she is fully entitled." That right is conceded to her in other civilizations where she is treated as a full-fledged person. There is no reason why the Jewish civilization should persist in treating her today as though she were an inferior type of human being.

I know of no modern writer on Judaism, who is essentially loyal to the tradition, who has so mercilessly stated the truth about the status of women in Jewish law. Though they may have fared better than women in surrounding cultures, their role was, nevertheless, fraught with inequity and difficulty. The basic question which Kaplan asks is: "What will Judaism do to abolish the woman's judicial, civil, and religious disabilities?" The honest answer is that the rest of Judaism did very little. It was not until Kaplan and his disciples took the lead that the other groupings within Judaism followed suit, and then only grudgingly. He asserts that it is "social justice rather than immutable precedent that must govern the civic life of Judaism." A reconstituted Jewish civilization will legislate to remove disabilities and give women their rightful place in Jewish society as they have already achieved it in non-Jewish society. It was among Kaplan's disciples that the *bat mizvah* was developed, that women were called to the Torah, that they began to be counted to the *minyan* and where they served as rabbis. If for no other achievement, Kaplan would win an important place in the historical development of Jewish law for provoking world Jewry into considering the inequities that are involved.

Professor Kaplan also turned his attention to "ritual usage," and he and his followers formulated a guide which was widely disseminated. He recognizes that the "complete elimination of all Jewish religious rituals would render Jewish survival difficult, if not impossible." What is needed is a rationale convincing to Jews to undertake the regimen of *halakhah*.

As has been said, Kaplan undertakes to provide this rationale. Jews remain Jews, especially in the Diaspora, out of a recognition that their allegiance to the community enriches their lives, or, to use the specifically Kaplanian terminology, contributes to their salvation. Being part of a people is indispensable to individual happiness. Thus, one rationale for observances is that through them the individual is able to identify with the larger Jewish community. The round of Jewish observances fills the Jew

with a feeling of significance, even of play. He is able to mark the important days of his life, his festivals and holy days, in a manner which attaches him to his people and, thereby, also enriches him. The obligation to observance is not a supernatural mandate; it is a way in which the individual Jew finds significance in his life. The law has served the Jews — it is not the Jews who served the law. It is important that, in his later works, such as the magisterial *The Future of the American Jew*, Kaplan does not use the terminology that he employed in his first important work, *Judaism as a Civilization*. Jewish observances are no longer “folkways” peculiar to the Jewish people. The newer formulation stresses that Jewish observance has the dual function “of contributing to Jewish group survival and to the personal self-fulfillment of the individual.”

This rationale for Jewish law has several corollaries. First, it is impossible to insist on ritual conformity. People, according to their circumstances, will incorporate different modes of ritual observances into their lives. As a matter of fact, Kaplan asserts that “the vocabulary of ‘law,’ ‘sin,’ ‘pardon’ is ideologically and pragmatically unjustified as applied to ritual.” He goes so far as to say that “modern thought acknowledges the propriety of the concept of ‘law’ only in nature and in human relationships; in the sphere of ritual, of the relationship between man and God, there can be no law.” This is a departure from previous practice in Kaplan’s thought when he used the term “Jewish law” to cover all of the various parts of the halakhic code. In his later works, he denies that ritual observances can be properly called “law.” They have no determined, fixed form, nor does their transgression carry any sanction.

What saves this view from “individual whim” is the factor that the individual Jew needs to identify with his people. His ritual usage must contain the power of self-identification with the group. If his individual actions deviate too much from the norm, they lose the power of identification. What is desirable is not “uniformity of observance . . . but unity of purpose.” The purpose of Jewish ritual observance is to identify with the group and, through this identification, to enhance individual lives.

In assessing the contribution of Professor Kaplan to the development of Jewish law in our time, we are impressed, as always, by his courage and originality. Foremost among contemporary thinkers, he removed the masks of obfuscation and hyperbole which were frequently used to cover up the real problems concerning Jewish law. He was merciless, even extreme, in pointing out that modern Jews could not, in good conscience, accept the traditional theological and historical basis for Jewish observance. With the advances of scientific and scholarly criticism we could not simply say that the prescriptions of *halakhah* were given by God at Mount Sinai. He proposed, therefore, to base his recommendations on what he considered the accepted world view of today’s Jews — namely, naturalism, which denied the existence of the Transcendent. Jewish law would be part of belonging to the Jewish people which would serve to enhance life and bring it fulfillment.

Recent Jewish thought has discovered the Transcendent. It has realized that life lived within the parameters of nature would not bring salvation, since men encountered the Transcendent in their deepest religious moments. With the growing popularity of thinkers such as Buber, Franz Rosenzweig and Abraham J. Heschel, it became evident to many Jews that the problem of Jewish law should be seen against the background of the idea of "covenant," that Jewish existence meant engagement with God, who, though working within history, was above and beyond history. Rather than "folkways," Jewish law was the living-out of the covenant on the level of doing. It is true that the observances of the law contribute to Jewish survival. However, the question which drives many Jews to an answer is: survival for what? Without conviction of Jewish election and covenant, does survivalism become a narrow ethnocentrism? Can observance be religiously meaningful without a conviction that it is somehow related to our commitment to a God who is beyond our own conceptions and not identified with anything in this world? Kaplan, in his recent works, has sought to go beyond naturalism to what he calls "trans-naturalism." As I understand it, that means that somehow the whole is greater than the parts, that God is the sum total of all natural forces which promote human good. This is still far from the deepest encounters of our existence as Jewish individuals in which we experience a God who is near, yet Beyond.

There is also some question about the use of the term "law" in Kaplan's thought. He insists that Jewish rituals cannot be subsumed under the idea of "law" because they lack sanctions and, also, because they are not to be rigidly observed. This definition of law may serve for national or secular law. Indeed, it is Kaplan's main observation that Jewish peoplehood means that Jewish existence is somehow subsumed under a quasi-political definition. However, I believe it is true that when we use the term *halakhah*, or Jewish law, we mean that Jewish piety is not episodic and subjective. We see that Jewish religiosity is expressed, at least on its minimum level, in an ordered, structured, and predictable form. When we use the term, we mean that we are commanded to do, not necessarily because we have a religious experience at the moment of doing. We do in order to gain religious depth; we continue to do even when we are in a spiritual desert, hoping that the continuous doing will lead us to an oasis. This is the essence of the Jewish insistence on a *structure* of observance. In this sense, Jewish religious living is *law*. Of course, we do not eliminate Jews who do not conform to our prescribed structure; we accept them as they are. However, we hope that, with our guidance and with God's grace, they will come closer to the full observance which we believe to be worthwhile and required.

Kaplan is right in insisting that a non-fundamentalist view of *halakhah* does make it possible, and even imperative, to correct the deficiencies of the received codes. These are the attempts of Jewish piety to express the divine imperatives, but it is clear that the content of the divine imperatives

does change with differing circumstances and different insights into social reality. There must be a constant interplay between *aggadah* and *halakhah*, each criticizing the other. Kaplan's epoch-making insistence that the Jewish traditional attitude toward women is in need of radical revision is a reflection of his basic insight that no Jewish law can be defended if it results in unethical outcomes. Whatever the rhetoric, the application of received Jewish norms in, for example, divorce proceedings, does bring with it heart-ache and injustice. These norms must be changed and, I am happy to say, they have been, in the Conservative movement, though there is still a long way to go. It is the specific norm which is changed, not the idea of having norms. To put it another way: the Law is eternal, though the laws may change.

I believe that Professor Kaplan is too harsh on Conservative Judaism. Perhaps his inability directly to influence its institutions, notwithstanding the extraordinary place that he holds in the hearts and minds of graduates of the Seminary, is the cause. It is true that, in the past, Conservative Judaism was slow in living up to its mandate, encapsulated in its slogan "tradition and change." However, in the last decade there has been movement. The trend toward the enfranchisement of women has gained momentum. There have been some significant changes in the halakhic practices of Conservatism aiming toward more consistency and meaning. There have been convincing statements of the philosophy of *halakhah*, stressing some of the themes of Kaplan's thought: readiness to revise, recognition of the new situation in which we find ourselves, and abandonment of fundamentalism. Speaking personally, I would say that the most potent idea which Kaplan taught was that Jewish law cannot be invoked against the ethical imperatives of Judaism and humane thought. The law is not an end in itself; it is the way we live out our covenant relationship and the way we concretize the values which undergird our common life. When the specific paragraphs of Jewish received tradition frustrates these demands, the specifics must yield.

Kaplan's view that changes ought to be democratically arrived at is fraught with ambiguity. It is true that more input should be exercised by laymen, especially since we are now blessed with an abundance of distinguished Jews who are experts in law, sociology, psychology, and philosophy. The rabbis and scholars would profit greatly from consultation with those for whom the legislation is intended. However, in order to insure the continuity which Kaplan so rightly esteems, the progress of Jewish law ought to follow the traditional pattern: judicial interpretation of precedents liberally applied. It is better to correct the *agunah* outrage the way the Conservatives have done — by applying the powers of annulment given to the rabbis — than to declare that usages of centuries now cease to function. This approach may strike some people as devious, but continuity in a civilization is of inestimable value. It should be preserved.

It is also interesting that Reform Judaism has changed since Kaplan published his great works. Classical Reform of the 19th century, with its

disdain of *halakhah*, survives only as a remnant. The newer leaders, who have a growing appreciation of *halakhah*, should now be included in the halakhic-community, working together with others to make Jewish observance the norm of Jewish living.

Most surprising has been the rebirth of Orthodoxy. Older Orthodox rabbis spoke in Kaplanian terms in justifying their *halakhic* stance; they stressed the survival value of Jewish observance and its power to enhance life. Today's Orthodoxy, however, is much more fundamentalist than it was in the forties and fifties. Its success in some circles is due not to its coping with modernism, but to a rejection of contemporary trends. There are people who are so disillusioned with the absurdities of today's culture that the very negation of modernism is not a distraction but an attraction. It is in the very centers of educated young Jewry — the Ivy League universities — that Orthodoxy in its most uncompromising stance seems to flourish.

Professor Kaplan's achievements are epochal. His courageous and clear mind has illumined the problems that we face and he has offered solutions. We cannot go all the way with him in the realization of his bold prescriptions, but together with the rest of the Jewish world we can rejoice that he is among us and pointing the way toward the future.

Myths About Mordecai Kaplan

IRA EISENSTEIN

PERHAPS EVERY CONTROVERSIAL FIGURE generates myths, either during his lifetime or afterwards. In the case of Mordecai Kaplan, the myths have multiplied over the course of his long life (may his years increase!). As a matter of fact, they began to circulate early: one of the first subtly suggested that his heterodoxy had proceeded so far that he had not circumcised one of his children. His four daughters did not think that was funny.

However, with the publication of *Judaism as a Civilization*, the myths proliferated. With the help of those who had read his book, but not very carefully, and those who had not, the word went abroad that Kaplan was a *secularist*. In the introduction to the 1957 re-issue of that work, he referred to this myth:

It is, perhaps, not too much to expect that the reappearance of *Judaism as a Civilization* (1957) will help to vindicate the Reconstructionist movement against those who charge it with being more secular than religious, in that it treats the problem of Judaism as a socio-psychological rather than a theological problem.¹

The confusion arose from the fact that Kaplan did embrace secularism and secularists, but a careful reading of those passages in his writings which refer to either or both reveals that the meaning which he attached to the terms was fundamentally different from that generally associated with the word "secular." In the popular mind, secular is the opposite of and, indeed, the rival of religious; in Kaplan's writings secular bears the connotation of *worldly*, as distinct from *other-worldly*.

Since Kaplan always associated religion with the striving for salvation, the shift from other-worldly to worldly salvation did not represent a departure from religion but a change in the conception of the *locus* of salvation. "As soon as Renaissance humanism and Enlightenment rationalism began to undermine the belief in other-worldly salvation, the human mind began to explore the possibilities of this-worldly, or secular salvation."²

The charge that Kaplan is a secularist (in the popular sense) is usually reenforced by his frequent reference to humanism; here a parallel myth persists, because humanism is, as a rule, considered a synonym of sec-

1. Long before Reconstructionism became a "movement" Kaplan referred to it as such. What he had in mind was a "school of thought"; only later did he change the connotation, with the establishment of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College.

2. *The Greater Judaism in the Making* (New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1960), p. 167; see also p. 156.

ularism. But here, again, Kaplan's caveats are ignored. Recognizing the possibility that guilt by association might condemn him as anti-religious, he always adds a qualifying term, often "spiritual" or "religious humanism." Thus:

Judaism is now on the threshold of a fourth stage in its development, and the civilization into which it will grow will be humanistic and spiritual . . . The center of gravity of the spiritual interests will again be the here and the now (reverting to the Biblical stage-I.E.) and communion with God will again be a possible normal experience for the Jew. Instead of being an outward visible experience, communion with God will be realized in the inwardness of mind and heart.³

And again:

Although spiritual religion dispenses with supernatural revelation, it is not humanism. It differs from humanism in the assumption that man's cosmos is en rapport with the human will to salvation . . . The need for self-fulfillment implies that man's environment is so constituted as to enable him to meet that need.⁴

A third myth, in addition to those of Kaplan as secularist and as humanist, portrays him as a cold rationalist, a Litvakian logical positivist. The absurdity of that characterization can be appreciated only by those who know the man. If ever there was a passionate lover of life and of Judaism, it is Mordecai Kaplan. What has misled people is his equally passionate defense of reason; love should not be totally blind. Speaking of the intuition of God, he says,

[It] is the absolute negation and antithesis of all evaluations of human life which assume that consciousness is a disease, civilization a transient sickness, and all our efforts to lift ourselves above the brute only a vain pretense . . . This intuition is not merely an intellectual assent. It is the "yes" of our entire personality. "That life is worth living is the most necessary of assumptions," says Santayana, "and were it not assumed, the most impossible of conclusions."⁵

Again:

To the question: "Is salvation attainable?" the Jewish religion answers, "Seek it and find out." There is no other way to answer the question. It is not subject to argument, because the affirmation must come not from our reason alone but from our whole being. The quest for more abundant, more creative and more harmonious living is itself an expression of the will to live.⁶

Again:

Whence do we derive this faith in a Power that endorses what ought to be? Not from that aspect of the mind which has to do only with mathematically

3. *Judaism as a Civilization* (New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1957), p. 214; see also pp. 36-37.

4. *The Future of the American Jew* (New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1967), p. 193.

5. *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion* (New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1962), p. 27.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85.

and logically demonstrated knowledge. Such faith stems from that aspect of the mind which finds expression in the enthusiasm for living, in the passion to surmount limitations, a passion which is uniquely human. Those who possess this enthusiasm, and who consequently strive for a better world, are believers in God.⁷

Rationalism is wedded to naturalism insofar as it operates on the assumption that everything, in the physical world, the sub-human and the human, follows the law of its own being. But Kaplan contends that naturalism errs in assuming that it knows the full nature of "nature."

The natural (he writes) is more than a synonym for the regular and the usual . . . The tendency nowadays is to enlarge the concept of the natural so that it might include that plus aspect of reality which the traditional outlook did indeed sense but not altogether apprehend . . . All advanced thinking nowadays tends to recognize that the mechanistic interpretation of existence is only a half-truth. The fact that the minutest fraction of reality is determined by the whole of reality, and that each living organism determines as a totality the behavior of every part of itself, introduces the entire cluster of meanings and values which constitute the spiritual aspect of life.⁸

In his later writings, Kaplan elaborates upon this discussion, introducing the concept of "transnaturalism" to describe that aspect of reality which is "more than the sum of its parts." It is here that he explodes another myth, namely, that he does not acknowledge the dimension of the transcendent.

Transcendence does not imply overstepping the limits of natural law. It merely implies taking into account a dimension within human nature which some scientists ignore. That is the dimension of value which differentiates human nature from sub-human nature . . . Living beings add up to more than the sum of their parts.⁹

For Kaplan, the realm of values corresponds to observed characteristics in the cosmos. Those characteristics, mediated through man, are translated into human values. Thus, the experience of moral responsibility is seen by him to reflect the phenomenon of polarity in nature. "All moral responsibility involves two referents, a self and an other, and thus accentuates the bi-polar character of the human person." Another factor in the sense or experience of moral responsibility is creativity. "The tension between the two poles of the human person, which gives rise to the awareness of human polarity and organicity, is always occasioned by the need to decide between two or more courses of action. Those alternatives are called to mind by the two mental capacities in which man excels all other living beings: memory and imagination. Thus a situation comes into existence which is a complete novelty in man's universe."¹⁰ Creativity, in

7. Ibid., pp. 327-328; see also *The Future of the American Jew*, pp. 194-195, 196; *The Meaning of God*, p. 325.

8. *Judaism as a Civilization*, pp. 314-315.

9. *The Religion of Ethical Nationhood* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), p. 89; see also p. 109.

10. *Greater Judaism*, pp. 499-500; see also pp. 498-499.

other words, is a major aspect of divinity in the cosmos.

Another myth derives from those already mentioned, namely that Kaplan has no appreciation of the mystical, the mysterious, the unknown, that which transcends the senses. Like the rest, the charge is misdirected.

No religious experience is genuine (he writes) without elements of awe and mystery, provided they do not lead to occultism or supernaturalism. No religious experience is possible without an overwhelming awareness of reality as baffling man's power of comprehension . . . Due to the impact of a transcendent presence, religion stresses the awareness of that presence as an end in itself; it would have us see in communion with God the ultimate self-fulfillment. This is, indeed, the purpose of worship, religious symbols, ceremonies and all other activities and disciplines which are intended to foster an awareness of God.¹¹

Linked to the experience of the presence of God is that of holiness.

Religion has the one word which seeks to express that meaning in all its depth and mystery. That word is "holiness." It is folly to try to eliminate the concept of holiness from our vocabulary. It is the only accurate term for our deepest and most treasured experiences. The moment any situation evokes from us the awareness that we have to do with something to which no other term than "sacred" is adequate, we are on the point of discovering God. In fact, we already sense His reality.¹²

As though to refute all myths concerning Kaplan's secularism, naturalism, humanism, disregard of the transcendent and the mysterious, he stresses again and again the central role of religion in Jewish civilization.

Of all civilizations, Judaism can least afford to omit religion. Religion has loomed so large in the entire career of the Jewish people that its elimination would leave Judaism impoverished, especially since its other elements are still in the process of acquiring their own structural reality. If the glory of a civilization consists in the uniqueness of its contribution to human culture, then religion was, and will remain, the glory of the Jewish civilization. Take religion out and Judaism becomes an empty shell.¹³

Nevertheless, he is equally concerned not to fall between two stools. He defends the role of religion against the onslaughts of the anti-religionists; but he never neglects to remind his readers that this does not mean total surrender to anti-reason.

To be both enlightening and liberating, religion must be based on faith in reason, and resort under all circumstances to the rational conclusions of empirical experience. This does not imply that there is no room in religion for faith, intuition or mystic experience. With the human mind inherently incapable of ever actually sounding the nethermost depths of reality, it is impossible for man to wait with the process of living until he has achieved absolute certainty. But even when we recognize that reason as such cannot fully guide us, and learn that there are moments when somehow we find our way in life by non-rational methods, we dare not stray off into by-paths of the mind without the special authorization which only reason is entitled to

11. *Future*, p. 198.

12. *Meaning of God*, pp. 31, 83.

13. *Judaism as a Civilization*, pp. 305-306; also p. 214.

grant . . . Only reason itself can know what its limitations are, and it alone has the right to determine what they are.¹⁴

These are only a few of the myths about Kaplan which ought to be dealt with in any single essay. Others ought, at another time, be discussed. I shall merely refer to them here, pending treatment of them later, and perhaps elsewhere. I refer to the notions of his "optimism" concerning the nature of man, the failure to deal with man's blind and raging passions; his faith in the unlimited potential for good, both in the life of the individual and in society; his "failure" to confront the problem of evil; his rejection of the idea of the chosen people and the reasons behind that rejection; his down-grading of *mizvot* to the level of "folkways"; his attack on the synagogues and his advocacy of the organic Jewish community; his "rejection" of *halakhah*.

Much remains to be written about Kaplanian myths. In a sense it is regrettable that, after his many books and his innumerable articles, he is not properly understood. But perhaps, too, the prevalence of myths is a tribute to his major role in 20th century Judaism. Myths are not concocted about non-entities.



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14. *Future*, p. 170.

Mordecai M. Kaplan and Reform Judaism

BERNARD MARTIN

THAT PROFESSOR MORDECAI M. KAPLAN HAS exercised a significant influence on Reform Judaism in the last three or four decades and continues to do so is beyond dispute. At least two living former presidents of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, David Polish and Roland B. Gittelsohn, are among his ardent disciples. Another former president of the Conference, Levi Olan, clearly follows much of Kaplan's teaching, especially in his optimistic view of the nature of man.¹ The president of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Dr. Alfred Gottschalk, who has published studies of *Aḥad Ha-Am*, pays frequent tribute to the greatness of the founder of Reconstructionism. Dr. Alvin J. Reines, currently professor of Jewish philosophy at the College-Institute, holds naturalist and humanist theological views that are, in certain respects, strikingly similar to Kaplan's and has, I am told, numerous disciples, particularly within the younger segment of the Reform rabbinate. Among the leading Reform rabbis of recent decades, now deceased, who accepted much of the Kaplanian theology were Barnett Brickner and Jacob J. Weinstein.

Within the "rank and file" of the Reform rabbinate today, Kaplan continues to be widely admired. A sociological study published in 1972² indicates that more than one out of four (28%) of the members of the CCAR at that time considered themselves, as far as their personal theological beliefs are considered, either non-traditionalist (14%), agnostic (13%), or atheistic (1%). There is not much reason to suppose that things have changed very much in the last decade, and I think there are good grounds for believing that the majority of the non-traditionalist Reform rabbis would have considerable sympathy for, and possibly even identify themselves fully with, Dr. Kaplan's naturalist theological position. Let me say, perhaps superfluously, that it is a position I do not share.

The significant degree of popularity enjoyed by Kaplan's view among Reform rabbis and within the Reform movement at large is hardly surprising. He is regarded as a rationalist, scientific thinker, and rationalism and scientism, despite the incisive criticisms made of them not only by the existentialists but by philosophers of other schools, are still apparently apotheosized by most present-day liberal religious leaders. Furthermore,

1. For his concept of God, however, Olan is far more indebted to Alfred North Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne, and so-called "process" philosophy in general.

2. Theodore I. Lenn and associates, *Rabbi and Synagogue in Reform Judaism* (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1972), p. 99.

BERNARD MARTIN is *Abba Hillel Silver professor of Jewish Studies, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio.*

Kaplan's style, only occasionally enlivened by a spark of wit or charm, has at least the merits of clarity and simplicity. Indeed, I would urge that his tendency to oversimplify complex theological issues is one of his chief characteristics and one, incidentally, that perturbs me perhaps more than anything else in his work.

There is another reason for Dr. Kaplan's popularity in Reform Judaism as well as in Conservative Jewry. After all, not only is there nothing difficult but there is also very little new or original in his thought. I make bold to suggest that anyone who has read Aḥad Ha-Am, Simon Dubnow, Herbert Spencer, Émile Durkheim, William James, John Dewey and Henry Nelson Wieman with insight and appreciation must conclude that perhaps ninety-five percent of Kaplan's thought is simply a rearrangement of ideas, often drastically oversimplified, of these men. One who has read Louis August Sabatier, W. Robertson-Smith, C.S. Peirce, F.C.S. Schiller, George Herbert Meade and Horace M. Kallen will at once recognize at least four percent of the remainder.

Nevertheless, there is also something rather astonishing about the adulation that Dr. Kaplan has received from so many persons within American Reform Judaism. The fact is that he has not been particularly kind in his own comments about it. Despite all the evidence that Reform Judaism of the last thirty or forty years has changed radically from what was preached by Isaac Mayer Wise and Kaufmann Kohler, Kaplan insists on identifying contemporary Reform with the long-rejected views of these men. While occasionally throwing to it a back-handed compliment in a rather begrudging way, he insists that it has been, and continues to be, thoroughly misguided. Thus, for instance, he concedes that Reform

formulated some highly valuable spiritual and ethical truths, though many of these truths are themselves in need of being reformulated to fit into the framework of latter-day thought. But there is something radically wrong with the Reformist theology. It starts with a false premise as to what it is that makes one a Jew. It assumes that what unites Jews to one another, and differentiates them from the rest of mankind, is their religion. Thus conceived, the Jewish religion comes to be a series of general or universal teachings about God and man, apart from the specific social realities of the Jewish people.³

That statement, written in a book published in 1937, when the Columbus Platform had only recently been adopted, might be forgiven, although Dr. Kaplan must surely have been aware that already in the late nineteenth century such outstanding Reform leaders as Rabbis Bernard Felsenthal, Gustav Gottheil and Max Heller had espoused Zionism and that in the first decades of the twentieth the eloquent voices of Stephen S. Wise and Abba Hillel Silver were listened to with increasing respect, especially by Reform rabbis. But what is one to say to a statement written by Dr. Kaplan in the mid-1950s and published toward the end of that decade? He concedes that

3. *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion* (1937), p. 14.

the Central Conference of American Rabbis, in the Columbus Platform of 1937, which replaced the Pittsburgh Platform of 1886,⁴ has undone the mistake of the first Reform leaders (and correctly notes that) the peoplehood of the Jews is stressed as basic to the understanding of Judaism, and the indispensable role of Eretz Yisrael is likewise recognized.

So far so good. These lines, however, are immediately followed by these words:

Unfortunately, instead of marking, as it should, a *volte face* in the Reform movement, that change has not even reached the talking state. It is *seldom*⁵ alluded to in Reform preaching and teaching. In the meantime, a vociferous minority under the banner of American Council for Judaism is trying to reinstate the repudiated Reform doctrine that was fathered by Napoleon I [sic].⁶

In the mid-1950s not only Dr. Silver, but a host of other Reform rabbis and laymen as well, had been preaching Zionism and Jewish peoplehood for years, and the American Council for Judaism, a very miniscule minority indeed, may have been “vociferous” in its rantings, but who was listening except the paltry few hundred members of the Council itself?

Among the most remarkable characteristics of Dr. Kaplan are his immutability, his imperviousness and his non-responsiveness to historical change. He has, of course, written a great deal. I have, over the years, read a fair sampling of it, and it has struck me repeatedly that virtually everything Kaplan had to say was exhausted in the 1930s in *Judaism as a Civilization* (1934) and *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion* (1937). Practically all that he wrote after the publication of these volumes is only a restatement, with insignificant variations, of what he had said simply and clearly enough in them. The imperviousness and non-responsiveness to obvious historical changes is reflected not only in Kaplan’s refusal to take account of the altered realities of Reform Judaism, but also, and perhaps even more egregiously and regrettably, in his tenacious refusal to modify his highly optimistic view of the nature of man — even after Auschwitz and Hiroshima, Viet Nam and Bangladesh.

However, what is today even more surprising, indeed almost incomprehensible, about the near reverence in which Dr. Kaplan’s theological and social views are held, is the fact that virtually all of them were anticipated and clearly expressed by a number of outstanding Reform rabbis of the generation prior to his own.

I take only one example. Dr. Emil Gustav Hirsch, who served as rabbi of Chicago Sinai Congregation from 1880 to 1923, is not particularly well known, certainly not as well known as he should be, to the younger

4. The Pittsburgh Platform, as Kaplan should have known (he is not always careful about his facts), was actually adopted in 1885 and by a group of Reform rabbis and “ministers” who spoke for no one except themselves. The platform itself never had any official status in the Reform movement and, from the time of its promulgation, was repeatedly attacked and rejected by leading Reform rabbis.

5. Italics are mine.

6. *Judaism Without Supernaturalism* (1958), p. 133.

members of the CCAR today. Yet, in this time, he was a towering figure and exercised enormous influence on the Reform movement. He was an excellent scholar and for many years served as professor of rabbinic literature and philosophy at the University of Chicago. He was also the author of some 300 articles in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (1901–06). Unfortunately, the only book appearing under his name is *My Religion*,⁷ a collection of some of his least impressive sermons and addresses, most of them delivered long after his prime and collected posthumously by a rather injudicious compiler. To obtain a true picture of Hirsch's thought, as well as of his extraordinary eloquence, one must read the hundreds of sermons and studies in Jewish history and philosophy published in the weekly *Reform Advocate* of Chicago, which he edited for some thirty years.⁸

A reading of these sermons and studies indicates that many of the things that Dr. Kaplan has said and that are central in his religious and social philosophy were said long before him, but with much greater eloquence and power, by Dr. Hirsch. Limitations of space compel me to confine myself to only a few illustrations.

Kaplan defines God as the power that makes for man's salvation and insists that religion, in general, and Judaism, in particular, must be based not on theology but on anthropology. Thus, in the mid-1950s he wrote:

[R]eligion which aims to improve human nature and the conditions of human living cannot be based on the ultimate nature of God. Its field of operations must be the nature of man. *It is the business of religion not to give a metaphysical conception of God, but to make clear what we mean by the belief in God, from the standpoint of the difference that belief makes in human conduct and striving.*⁹ The point of contact between man and God, or as it is fashionable to state it nowadays, the encounter between man and God, is man's sense of freedom and responsibility. . . . This is where the attributes of wisdom, justice and love, in the conception of God, have to be stressed.¹⁰

I humbly submit that Emil G. Hirsch made essentially the same naive and simplistic points, but with considerably more elegance, in the 1890s. In 1896 he wrote:

The question fundamental for man to ask is not "What is God?" but "What is He for us as man?" What is God for man is indeed the basic inquiry of Judaism, and to it Judaism gives a clear and definite answer: God for man stands in the consciousness of man's dignity, "little less than God," higher, immeasurably higher, than the brutes, and therefore for the appreciation that man's life is distinct from the brutes and dowered for ends higher than those that have come to the beast.¹¹

7. New York, 1925.

8. On Hirsch's thought, see my studies of many years ago, "The Religious Philosophy of Emil G. Hirsch," *American Jewish Archives* (June, 1952): 66–82, and "The Social Philosophy of Emil G. Hirsch," *Ibid.* (June, 1954): 151–65. Both of these articles were reprinted in *Critical Studies in American Jewish History* (1971). For biographical information, see Hirsch's *My Religion*, pp. 11–23; *Yearbook of the Central Conference of American Rabbis*, 33 (1923), pp. 145–54; and the *American Jewish Year Book*, 27 (1925–26), pp. 230–37.

9. Italics are Kaplan's.

10. *Judaism Without Supernaturalism*, pp. 26–27.

11. "The Sociological Center of Religion," *Reform Advocate*, 11 (1896): 162.

Three years earlier Hirsch had already proclaimed:

For the belief in God is merely the outcome of the belief in man. God is the apex of the pyramid, not the base. Man is the cornerstone; and from the true conception of man have the Jewish thinkers risen to the noblest conception of the Deity.¹²

If further evidence is required that, long before Kaplan appropriated Matthew Arnold's well known formulation of deity, namely, that it is the power not ourselves which makes for righteousness (Kaplan generally prefers the term "salvation"), Hirsch did so, I quote the latter's stentorian proclamation of 1892: "The spirit of our God broods over the mighty waters of Time. It is the enduring right and justice; righteousness and truth are the goals for which a power not ourselves is making in the conflicts and the contentions, in the contortions of time."¹³

Among the most best known features of Dr. Kaplan's religious philosophy are his pragmatic understanding of truth, apparently derived (in somewhat distorted fashion) from C.S. Peirce and William James, and his general identification of revelation with reason. This identification is, of course, coupled with a rejection of the classical notions of revelation as the supernatural communication of divine truth or the living, personal experience of God Himself.

In all of this Kaplan was clearly and unambiguously anticipated by Hirsch. In a sermon preached in 1916 he presents a thoroughly pragmatic test for theological ideas:

. . . this is the final test of the truth or untruth of a constructive or disintegrating philosophy of life. What increases man's sense of power, and therefore, for him, the content of life, is true. What tends to the diminishing of the store of moral resiliency and of the energy needed for resisting as well as for onward pushing is corrupting, and therefore marked by falsehood's taint.¹⁴

It is a commonplace that, for Mordecai Kaplan, Judaism is not a religion but, rather, the evolving religious civilization of the Jewish people, a civilization whose primary value lies in its ethical teachings. Already in 1892 Hirsch had defined Judaism in much the same terms; the only substantive difference is that he does not speak explicitly of Jewish ethnicity or salvation.

In the common sense of the word, Judaism is not a religion, it is not a system of dogmas, of sacramental grace; it is not a bundle of rights and ceremonies; it is not a road to happiness in the hereafter; it is not a scheme of salvation from original sin; it does neither stand nor fall with our views as to the character of those books we call sacred and as to their authorship. But it is a message to the world that righteousness must be its own reward, and is of that force which builds the world and shapes the courses of men.¹⁵

12. "Old Age," *Ibid.*, 5 (1893): 244.

13. "The Two Books," *Ibid.*, 4 (1892): 85.

14. "In Thy Hands Are My Tides," *Ibid.*, 52 (1916): 231.

15. "The True Victor and His Arms," *Ibid.*, 3 (1892): 129.

In his fantastically hopeful conception of human nature and his conviction that social progress is an undeniable reality, Kaplan follows essentially the same tradition as Hirsch. Both, I suggest, derived their highly simplistic views from the same nineteenth century reinterpretation of Darwinism in British and American philosophy. I have elsewhere described the initially devastating results of the evolutionary theory and how it was reinterpreted to give support to the eighteenth-century Enlightenment faith in man, reason and progress as follows:

The effect of Darwinism on the religious conception of man had been, at first, revolutionary and destructive. But . . . [it] did not prove permanently so, nor did it affect adversely all old ideas. In the fields of philosophy and religion a group of thinkers . . . adapted Darwinian concepts to corroborate the received verities. . . . Man, they held, was still to be regarded as the consummation of creation, but instead of coming at the beginning of the process, he was now conceived as the end toward which the creative power of the universe had been tending throughout all time. Man's reason was still to be regarded as the divine spark, giving him uniqueness among mundane creatures and insuring his unbroken material and moral progress. Progress itself was exalted . . . into an absolute, a metaphysical entity inherent in the very structure of the universe. Evolution . . . was the central fact in nature and . . . was synonymous with progress.¹⁶

Following this naive nineteenth-century trend of thought and totally ignoring the realities of the twentieth century — the first World War, the rise of Fascism and Nazism, the brutalities of industrialized America and the sufferings resulting from the Great Depression — Dr. Kaplan in the mid-1930s still retained his glowing view of man and refused to concede any contemporary significance to the Biblical-rabbinic conception of sin. "Sin," he wrote, "can no longer mean the provocation of God's wrath through disobedience to His revealed law, nor can atonement mean the restoration to His grace by a pledge of future obedience, however sincere."¹⁷ A few pages further on he offered his naturalistic reinterpretation of the meaning of sin:

*If we identify God with that aspect of reality which confers meaning and value on life and elicits from us those ideals that determine the course of human progress, then the failure to live up to the best that is in us means that our souls are not attuned to the divine, that we have betrayed God.*¹⁸

Writing twenty years later, after the unspeakable horrors of World War II and the Holocaust, Dr. Kaplan still deplored as senseless the notion "that the sinfulness of man indicates that he has fallen away from his essential nature as authoritatively revealed by God." This notion, he added

takes no cognizance of the facts behind the theory of evolution or the discoveries of anthropology and psychology. It regards all of these as a part

16. Martin, "The Religious Philosophy of Emil G. Hirsch," *American Jewish Archives* (June, 1952): 75–76.

17. *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion*, p. 161.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 165. Italics are Kaplan's.

of that human culture which is tainted by its very humanity and the sin of pride . . . The only sense in which we can speak of man's being alienated from his essential nature is . . . that . . . man does not realize all of his own best potentialities. Such a conception, however, is no argument against human progress. It merely points the direction for future progress.¹⁹

I hope I will be forgiven for remarking that it is somewhat easier to excuse Hirsch, who lived in the relatively halcyon days of the nineteenth century, for having said fifty years earlier virtually the same things that Kaplan did on the subject. The idea that man is God-like and perfectible, as Hirsch declared in his inaugural sermon at Chicago Sinai Congregation in 1880 and repeated numerous times subsequently, is one of the chief cornerstones of Judaism.²⁰ Believing, as he did, that man can rise from his primordial animal state to the heights of moral excellence, and in fact does so, Hirsch refused to take the traditional idea of sin seriously.

Sin (he declared in 1894) is not offense against God, but against our humanity. It is not a state which came to us and which we cannot throw off; it is an act of our own. Sin is antisocial conduct, due to the want of resistance on our part to the influences of the animal world behind us, selfishness, or to the legacy of a phase of civilization over which and beyond which we should have passed on.²¹

In his conception of the meaning of ritual, prayer and worship, Kaplan follows essentially the same naturalist and humanist tradition as does Hirsch. In the mid-1930s Kaplan wrote:

*The dynamic of ethical action is the spirit of worship, the feeling that we are in God and God in us,*²² the yielding of our persons in voluntary surrender to those larger aims that express for us as much as has been revealed to us of the destiny of the human race.²³ Before worship can have any genuine spiritual influence upon us, before it can reveal God to us, we must qualify ourselves by an arduous discipline in deeds of self-control, honesty, courage and kindness. . . .²⁴

While Hirsch was quite antagonistic to the pseudo-liberalism of his day, which expressed itself mainly in mocking ancient Jewish customs and holding them up to ridicule, he himself, unlike Kaplan, cherished no romantic nostalgia for the traditional rites of Judaism. Indeed, he considered most of them outmoded products of a bygone age. Nevertheless, as a rabbi and leader of an organized congregation, he was compelled to find a justification and a rationale at least for public worship in the synagogue. They are essentially the same as those repeated half a century later by Kaplan. One of the major reasons for public prayer, Hirsch maintained, is

19. *Judaism Without Supernaturalism*, pp. 117–18.

20. See "The Crossing of the Jordan," *My Religion*, pp. 343–58. Cf. "What Is Truth?" Ibid., pp. 78–95, and "The Conclusion of the Matter: A New Religion or the Old?," Ibid., pp. 208–22.

21. "The Psychology of Sin," *Reform Advocate*, 7 (1894): 135.

22. Italics are Kaplan's.

23. *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion*, p. 245.

24. Ibid., p. 262. Italics are Kaplan's.

that it expresses the sense of Jewish identity and community.²⁵ Essentially, however, the fundamental purpose of ritual and prayer is ethical: "We pray and have ritual to remind us of our dignity and worth as men, of the fact that one man must live with others and through others."²⁶ Prayer, Hirsch categorically declared, is not a dialogue between man and God but an address of the lower in man to the higher in him. "True worship is not a petition to God; it is a sermon to our own selves. The words which are its raiments are addressed *to us*."²⁷ They speak of God and the divine in man, and thus make man find in himself the God that so often is forgotten when the battle rages and the batteries roar."²⁸ The basic function of the synagogue was to serve as a place and instrument of moral instruction. Prayer and worship are of secondary value, insofar as they prepare the mind and heart to receive the religious and ethical message of the pulpit.²⁹

I have noted elsewhere that Hirsch's understanding of the function of organized religion and of the synagogue "was very probably influenced by the Social Gospel movement which arose in the Protestant churches of America in the second half of the nineteenth century as a response not only to the humanists and the followers of Ethical Culture, but also to the urgent problems created by the new urban and industrial order. Many serious-minded men . . . dissatisfied with the old view which had made the church primarily an instrument to insure the otherworldly salvation of the individual . . . insisted that the church must address itself to the correction of social abuses and the amelioration of social ills. The pronouncement of the Social Gospel leaders very likely influenced Hirsch and many other Reform rabbis to proclaim a similar mission for the Synagogue."³⁰ Limitations of space preclude the citation of further examples to illustrate the fact that Emil G. Hirsch anticipated in print most of Mordecai M. Kaplan's central theological and philosophical views.

Even in his attitude toward Zionism, Hirsch preceded Kaplan. It was not, as is commonly supposed, Zionism as such that the rabbi of Chicago Sinai Congregation opposed, but *political* Zionism. Already in 1899 Hirsch argued that political Zionism posits too narrow and materialistic a destiny for the Jew. Its avowed purpose was merely to help the Jew escape misery, poverty, and persecution and to find security. But the Jew, Hirsch insisted, has a larger purpose and destiny than this. He has a messianic duty and obligation to work for the creation of the spiritual Zion — the great ideal of universal humanity and righteousness — even though he may suffer dire oppression in the attempt.³¹

In his mature thought on the subject, presented in a sermon preached in 1917, Hirsch repeated that his antagonism to *political* Zionism

25. "The Function of Prayer and Ritual in My Religion," *My Religion*, p. 125.

26. *Ibid.*

27. Italics are Hirsch's.

28. "The Function of Worship," *Reform Advocate*, 3 (1892): 109.

29. *Ibid.*

30. "The Religious Philosophy of Emil G. Hirsch," *Loc. cit.*, p. 78.

31. "Spiritual or Political Zionism," *Reform Advocate*, 16 (1899): 384-86.

was due basically to its conflict with his conception of the greater purpose of the Jewish people's life.

For me Israel's destiny foreshadowed in its very martyrdom and heroism is to be of greater service and meaning to mankind than what it can be if our rerise as a small political nation in a corner of anterior Asia is the ultimate of our checkered, tearwet, and bloodred career. I cannot bring myself to believe that with Jerusalem only another Bukharest, let us say with stage open for Hebrew plays whether moral or not, with articles of toilette placed on sale in show windows of shops bearing names spelled in Hebrew, and other triumphs of Hebrew sartorial art, yea with universities where chemistry talks Hebrew and economics adds a few technical terms to the Hebrew dictionary, we have justification for singing *Lo Amuth Ki E'h'yeh*, I shall not die, I am alive. I cannot forget to add *Weassaper Ma'ase Yah*. The purpose of my survival is to witness to the doings of God.³²

If Dr. Hirsch's actual sympathy for cultural or spiritual Zionism of the Kaplanian type be doubted, I cite the interesting fact that he was on terms of closest personal friendship with Stephen S. Wise and bequeathed his sizable library to Wise's projected Jewish Institute of Religion rather than to the Hebrew Union College. Having sat at the *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* under the feet of Abraham Geiger, Herman Steinthal and Moritz Lazarus, and having studied at the universities of Berlin and Leipzig, he was not overly impressed with the Cincinnati institution or with the intellectual capacities of its rabidly anti-Zionist president, Dr. Kaufmann Kohler. Since both Hirsch and Kohler were married to daughters of David Einhorn, they knew each other fairly well.

Though Emil G. Hirsch, as I have noted, is not widely known to contemporary Reform Jews, the name Abba Hillel Silver (1893–1963) still evokes a certain resonance, at least among the older generation of Jews of all "denominations." Silver, who was to emerge in the 1940s as the most practical and hard-headed of political Zionists and who was at the same time an ardent defender of the idea of the mission of Israel, an idea so disparaged by Dr. Kaplan, declared in 1935 in an address delivered before the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (and revised for publication a few years later):

There is a striking similarity between the theoretic position taken by Paul and that taken by the extreme leaders of Reform Judaism; and had these men been as consistent as Paul, and had they translated their loquacity about the Mission of Israel into a real missionary propaganda as did Paul and his followers, the logic of events would have brought about the secession also of their group from Jewish life. These reformist Rabbis . . . were denationalized Jews. They . . . conceived of Israel as "a candle which lights others and consumes itself." They . . . tried to erect Jewish life upon the slender, sagging stilts of a few theologic abstractions. They . . . felt the Law to be a burden. . . . The use of the Hebrew language in public worship, they maintained, was not only unnecessary from a legal point of view but from any other point of view as well. . . . To them, too, as to the apocalyptic

32. "The Last Half Century's Thought and Judaism," *Ibid.*, 53 (1917): 362.

visionaries of the first century, the Kingdom of God was just around the corner. . . .³³

Fortunately the views of these men did not prevail. . . The masses of Jewry recoiled from them. The facts of life soon dissipated the fumes of their universalistic romancing. . . The very men who framed the Pittsburgh Declaration felt the inadequacy of their definition. Twice in the Declaration they speak of the "Jewish people." They do not define the term "people," but the very fact that they resorted to the term indicates that they felt that the term "religious community" somehow failed to cover the full canvas of Jewish realities.

Dr. Kohler, who convoked the Pittsburgh Conference, and helped to draft its Declaration, found it necessary in his "Theology" to supplement this definition of Israel as a religious community, with the concept of race. "The Jew is born into it (Judaism) and cannot extricate himself from it even by the renunciation of his faith, which would but render him an apostate Jew. This condition exists, because the racial community formed, and still forms, the basis of the religious community."³⁴

And what of the myriads of our people . . . who can accept neither the theology of Judaism nor its code of religious observances, Orthodox or Reform, and who are yet very loyal and active Jews? Is there no room for them in the household of Israel? There would not be, if we regarded Israel as a "religious community" exclusively. . . . But being a nation, and not a religious community, there is room in Israel for *all* Jews, except for those who do no wish to be Jews. . . .

The Jewish people produced the Jewish religion, but people and religion are not synonymous terms. . . [T]he Jewish religion does not exhaust the full content of the Jewish people. In relation to its religion, Israel is both immanent and transcendent. . .

It is the *total* program of Jewish life and destiny, its vast inclusiveness and completeness that the religious leaders of our people should dwell on today — the religious and moral values, the universal concepts, the mandate of mission, as well as the *Jewish people itself*, and its national aspirations — in other words, the Jewish people as a religious-national entity. Thus the strength and security of our life will be retrieved, and whether in Palestine or in the Diaspora, we shall move forward unafraid upon the road of our destiny.³⁵

To those who would argue that Dr. Kaplan is at least the originator and foremost champion of the idea of the "organic" Jewish community, I would merely point out that it was his contemporary and friend, Judah Leon Magnes (1877–1948), a graduate of the Hebrew Union College in 1900, assistant rabbi of the staunchly anti-Zionist and classical Reform Temple Emanu-El of New York City (1906–1910) and at the same time secretary of the American Zionist Federation (1905–1908), who was chiefly responsible for the establishment of the *Kehillah* of New York City and presided over it from its foundation in 1908 until its unfortunate collapse in 1922. I quote a brief passage from Magnes' biography in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*:

33. Silver, *The World Crisis and Jewish Survival* (1941), pp. 132–33.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 134–35.

35. *Ibid.*, pp. 140–42. All italics are Silver's.

Founded to advance and coordinate Jewish life in New York City, the Kehillah dealt vigorously with such internal problems as religious life and Jewish education; in the latter area its Bureau of Jewish Education, directed by Samson Benderly, pioneered in the centralization and modernization of Jewish education in the U.S. The Kehillah was active and effective in labor arbitration and helped to repress crime in the immigrant Jewish areas in cooperation with the city's police department. It provided a nexus for cooperation between "uptown" and "downtown" Jews and a forum for Jewish public opinion. Magnes was the Kehillah's moving spirit and most competent leader, spokesman, peacemaker, fund raiser, and philosopher, and thus a leading figure in the metropolis. In 1905 he participated in the Zionist Congress at Basle as a member of the U.S. delegation. It was there that he came face to face with the leaders of Russian Jewry and through them he reached a greater understanding of East European Jewry. Back in New York (after his first visit in Palestine) he headed the greatest Jewish demonstration against the Kishinev pogroms and established the Self-Defense Association which collected funds for the purchase of arms to be smuggled to the Jewish self-defense bodies in Russia. In 1904 he joined Solomon Schechter's inner circle and moved toward religious traditionalism. In Zionism he became a disciple and follower of Ahad Ha-Am, whom Magnes called "The Harmonious Jew."³⁶

Let it be said, to Dr. Kaplan's credit, that he has labored indefatigably — but unsuccessfully — for the realization of the ideals that Magnes propounded.

As the one hundredth anniversary of Mordecai Menahem Kaplan's birth approaches, I salute him as a great Jew and a noble-hearted human being who has rendered services of inestimable value not only to the Jewish people but to mankind. And I wish him, along with all his admirers and friends all over the Jewish world, the traditional *ad me'ah ve-esrim*.

36. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 11 (1972), cols. 716–17.

Implication and Meaning in Kaplan's Use of Classical Jewish Sources

RONALD A. BRAUNER

THE APPROACH OF RABBI MORDECAI M. KAPLAN's one-hundredth birthday is a fitting occasion for contemplating the great contributions he has made to Jewish life and thought. It is virtually impossible to discuss any facet of Jewish civilization without reference to this prodigious and creative thinker. It becomes ever clearer that much of what he has taught has been so assimilated by his students, that often Kaplan is not recognized as the source of the original insight. It might be said that, overall, Kaplan's greatest contribution lies in his having uncovered, formulated and articulated a multitude of valid options for understanding and identifying with the Jewish tradition and that such formulation and articulation have enabled many to find *reason* in, and for, their Jewishness.

At times, a reader of Kaplan is unable, or even unwilling, to see "a meaning" that he wishes to express because his style, often dogmatic, is couched in terms of "the meaning." Those of us who admire and respect Kaplan, those of us who are convinced that the future of the American Jew will, indeed, be affected by what he has done, wish that what Kaplan has written not be rejected for its dogmatic overtones but, rather, valued for the basic method that he propounds (and Reconstructionism is a method!) and the intellectually liberating light that he has shed.

In his introduction to *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion*,¹ Kaplan sought to define clearly the context in which he would work in order to discover, extract and articulate for modern sensitivities those elements of rabbinic thought which would help "to maintain the continuity of the Jewish religion. . . ."² The ancients were criticized for their frequent use of "transvaluation," consisting of "ascribing meanings to the traditional content of a religion or social heritage which could neither have been contemplated nor implied by the authors of that content."³ Kaplan went on to argue vigorously for the use of "revaluation," which he defined as "disengaging from the traditional content those elements in it which answer permanent postulates of human nature, and . . . integrating them into our own ideology."⁴ Close examination of Kaplan's use of

1. Reconstructionist Press, New York, 1962 — hereafter referred to as *Meaning*.

2. *Meaning*, p. 3.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

RONALD A. BRAUNER is dean and director of the Rabbinic civilization program, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College.

classical sources, especially as reflected in *Meaning*, reveals that the rational, objective method of revaluation is, in the final analysis, no less subjective than is the transvaluation that he so vehemently eschewed.

The investigator is challenged to submit criteria proving that any given meaning in a traditional source "could neither have been contemplated nor implied by the authors of that content," and, at the same time, for purpose of revaluation, he must, indeed, demonstrate the standards whereby elements disengaged from traditional content "answer permanent postulates of human nature." I believe it is virtually impossible to determine "permanent postulates" as well to mark those aspects of content which could not have been contemplated or implied.⁵ Given the complexity of human perception, the innate subjectivity with which all humans apprehend and assimilate phenomena, the great difficulty inherent in reconstructing a contextual field that is long past and the imperfection of the written (and spoken) word as an adequate and reliable conveyor of intention and purport, it would seem that any investigator is, finally, left to function only with a mix of the subjective and objective. The determination of a particular implication in communication is as bound up with psychology as it is with semantics and the student is gravely misled who believes, even for a moment, that these disciplines can, in all instances, with proper application, render dependable truths which are beyond contention.

Kaplan, himself, in numerous instances, finds ultimate support for his assertions in the highly subjective use of *implication* and seems to rely upon the reader's recognition of the rightness of the assertion to substantiate the revaluation being made.

Throughout the variety of facts or teachings *implied*⁶ in the metaphor of the kingship or sovereignty of God, there is the basic *implication* that the status quo of human life constitutes an imperfect manifestation of godhood.⁷

There is one indulgence which he may not allow himself — the indulgence of aloofness. "Separate not thyself from the community," is an *implication* of covenantship on which we must insist.⁸

5. The reader's attention is drawn to two particularly valuable treatments of interpretation and reinterpretation by Dr. Henry Morris, an alumnus of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College — "Mordecai M. Kaplan's Criticisms of Maimonides' Reinterpretations," in *Shiv'im: Essays and Studies in Honor of Ira Eisenstein*, ed. by Ronald A. Brauner (New York and Philadelphia: KTAV and Reconstructionist Rabbinical College Press, 1977), pp. 269 ff; and "Interpretation and Reinterpretation in Maimonides and Spinoza," in *Jewish Civilization: Essays and Studies*, ed. by Ronald A. Brauner (Philadelphia: Reconstructionist Rabbinical College Press, 1979), pp. 75 ff.

6. Italics here and throughout are added.

7. *Meaning*, p. 107.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 99. Apropos the finding of implication in text, this citation from *Avot* 2:4, attributed to Hillel, very reasonably may have nothing to do with covenantship but, rather, reflect a particularly strong reaction to Jewish sectarian friction and dissension at the end of the last pre-Christian century. *Avot*, by virtue of its being a compilation of ethical/theological maxims, has lent itself, over the centuries, to much interpretation, transvaluation and revaluation. Those of a philosophical bent have had occasion to comment at length upon the implications and deeper meanings of *Avot* 3:19, uncritically assuming that the Hebrew *zafui*

For God exercises His sovereignty through us, and to delegate to others alive or dead the responsibility for our own ethical decisions is to refuse to contribute our share to establishing God's Kingdom; . . . Obedience to a code no matter how ancient and sanctified it may be, is not enough. This is the *clear implication* of faith in the Kingship of God, when we give to that metaphor the *only meaning it can have* in the light of our modern attitude to kingship.⁹

Implied in the existence of the sanctuary is the functioning of the collective life as the means of the self-fulfilment of the individual. . . .¹⁰

That even they were aware that repentance meant more than a momentary change of heart *seems to be implied*. . . .¹¹

Translated into literal fact, the thought *implied* in this Midrash is that only when God's justice is manifest in our midst, can the gifts of nature be appreciated in a religious spirit.¹²

In addition to the examples above (a few of many) in which *implication* is to be taken as the key to reasonable meaning, we find, in Kaplan's hand, an assertion that, without a particular implication, a given text would have no meaning at all:

"You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am Holy," would be utterly *without meaning* for us, if it did not *imply* the potentiality of human nature to rise to the height of those ethical ideals which evoke our adoration and worship. . . .¹³

There is something to be learned from Kaplan's arguing, in this citation, that Lev. 19:2 "would be utterly without meaning for us" or in his asserting that ". . . *our* conception of the soul cannot be that which our fathers held in the past. It too must undergo a change similar to the change in *our* conception of God. *We* can no longer look upon the soul as. . . ."¹⁴ On occasion, Kaplan would determine the meaning or implication of a given text in the light of what the contemporary mind can or cannot abide. When he declares that "we give to that metaphor the *only* meaning it can have in the light of our modern attitude to kingship,"¹⁵ he seems not so much to be uncovering a meaning implicit in the text as he is insisting that a particular meaning be derived which will be compatible with our own standards and sensibilities. Such an approach, in and of itself, would seem

zafah in Rabbinic Hebrew yields no more than "to regard, look at, watch." Despite the desires of subsequent generations of students of Jewish classical texts, *Avot* 3:19 should probably be rendered "All is observed (by God) and freedom of action is given." To the best of my knowledge, there exists no early Rabbinic text supporting the notion of God's "foreseeing" (with all the attendant philosophical *implications* of that term as developed from the 10th century C.E. onwards).

9. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 170.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 181.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 210, in commenting upon the midrashic use of Ps. 96:12 "Yea, let all the trees of the forest exult before the Lord. . . ."

13. *Ibid.*, p. 212.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 113.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

to bespeak the ultimate subjectivity inherent in what Kaplan assumes to be the objective approach of revaluation. To assert that a text “must mean” is, in itself, no substantiation of the reality of an original implication.

From this point of view, the traditional religious objective of “perfecting the world under the Kingdom of the Almighty” *must mean* the establishment of a social order that combines the maximum of individual self-realization with the maximum of social cooperation.¹⁶

It is interesting to note Kaplan’s recognition of the Rabbis’ use of implication (not unlike his own) when he writes:

The original for “vault” *agudato*, which the Rabbis take to mean “his band” enables them to regard that verse as emphasizing the significance of human cooperation and as *implying* that such cooperation manifests the reality and presence of God.¹⁷

Clearly, Kaplan’s great concern has been for making Judaism meaningful and accessible to the modern Jew while, at the same time, not severing connection and communion with the past (tradition). The extent to which that past can be shown to be built of sophisticated, intellectually justifiable ethical and theological substance will determine, in some measure, the extent to which moderns will identify with that tradition and find meaning in it. Exegesis and eisegesis are kindred spirits; transvaluation and revaluation are cut of the same cloth.¹⁸ Our present concerns are served by recognizing that the human being is a meaning seeker and that meaning derived from the tradition ultimately is validated, not by the application of elusive objective standards of interpretation, but, rather, through our own subjective needs, perceptions and sensitivities — the substance of revelation.

16. Ibid., p. 111.

17. Ibid., p. 242, commenting upon Hosea 12:7–10, Amos 9:6 and *Sifre*, Deuteronomy 33:5. Such Rabbinic terms as *zot omeret*, *emor me’atah*, *razah lomar*, *attah lamed*, *talmud lomar* and *mashma’* seem to comprise much of the selfsame vocabulary of *implication* and *revaluation* of which Kaplan speaks. Particularly appropriate here is the expression *lav beferush itmar ela mikelala itmar*, “it is not said explicitly but rather is implicit in principle” (*Berakhot* 11b). Although employed in a halakhic context here, the Rabbinic recognition of *implication* is, nonetheless, apparent. Of course, reference to any of the classical Jewish formulations of hermeneutic principles lends even further support.

18. Exegesis and eisegesis are closely related to the concepts of *peshat* and *derash*. I have argued that these Hebrew terms are not absolute in their application and that they must be seen as being relative to the delineation of areas of investigation outlined either consciously or unconsciously by the particular discussant (see “Rabbinics and Rabbinic Education,” p. 69, in *Shiv’im: Essays and Studies in Honor of Ira Eisenstein*.) I am intrigued to think that “revaluation” is Kaplan’s equivalent for *peshat* and that “transvaluation” is his equivalent for *derash*!

On the Making of Jews

WALTER I. ACKERMAN

EVEN A CURSORY ACQUAINTANCE WITH Mordecai Kaplan's work is sufficient for the conclusion that education — both in the limited sense of schooling and in its broader definition as the process whereby a culture is transmitted from one generation to another — is one of his major concerns. Indeed, one might argue that more than anything else Kaplan was an educator — his books, articles, and lectures, his long tenure as Dean of the Teachers Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary and as a member of the faculty of the Rabbinical School of the Seminary, together with his involvement in communal affairs, have all been dedicated to the explication of Judaism and the development of means and methods for the dissemination of Torah.

Kaplan's active connection with Jewish education and the practical workings of Jewish schools dates back to the very beginnings of his long and distinguished career. In 1909, the same year in which he was appointed Dean of the Teachers Institute, the Executive Board of the New York Kehillah, that grand experiment in communal organization, approved his proposal for a systematic survey of Jewish education in New York City. The findings of the survey, conducted by Kaplan and Bernard Cronson, a public school principal, were presented to the first annual convention of the Kehillah on February 27, 1910 and set the stage for the creation of the Bureau of Jewish Education of the Kehillah.¹ That study, the first of its kind and, as such, a model which was widely copied, reflected Kaplan's commitment to scientific method and gave practical expression to his belief that, in order to be effective, modern Jewish education — that is, Jewish education which is responsive to the needs of Jews living in the United States of the 20th century — must, among other things, be rooted in scientific theory and procedure.

Kaplan's deep involvement in both the development of the conceptual design for the Bureau of the Kehillah and the details of its practical operation, embodying as it does many of the major motifs of his thought, provides a context which is central to any assessment of his influence on Jewish education.² The New York Bureau was the first communal agency

1. The report was reprinted in *Jewish Education*, 20:3 (Summer, 1949): 113-116. It may also be found in Lloyd P. Gartner, *Jewish Education in the United States: A Documentary History* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1969), pp. 118-126.

2. The best short treatment of the Bureau may be found in Arthur A. Goren, *New York Jews and the Quest for Community* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), pp. 86-133. The most comprehensive study is by Nathan H. Winter, *Jewish Education in a Pluralist Society* (New York: New York University Press, 1966).

WALTER I. ACKERMAN is *Shane professor of education and chairman of the department of education, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Beer Sheva.*

for Jewish education in the United States; as such, it was the prototype for the establishment of similar offices in every major center of Jewish settlement in the country. Moreover, as Dean of the Teachers Institute, Kaplan became the teacher and mentor of that remarkable group of young men who were recruited by Samson Benderly, the founding director of the Bureau, and who subsequently assumed positions of educational leadership which were critical to the forming of American Jewish education. The excitement generated by the pioneering efforts of the Bureau and the opposition that it engendered, a reaction which led to the reorganization and severe curtailment of the agency's activities, are evidence both of the power of Kaplan's ideas, but little modified over the years, and of the obstacles in the way of their implementation.

A Bureau of Jewish Education, as conceived by Kaplan, is a logical outgrowth of the concepts of peoplehood and community which are so integral a part of his thought. Because "the basic unit of Jewish life cannot be any one agency" it follows that "[t]he entire aggregate of congregations, social service agencies, Zionist organizations, defense and fraternal bodies and educational institutions should be integrated into an organic or indivisible community."³ From here it is but a short stop to the conclusion that education — "the transmission of the social and spiritual heritage of the Jewish people" in order to create "a bond of unity and brotherhood" — is a primary communal responsibility. The function of the community, working through the office of a central agency for education, is "to create schools, to supervise them, to train teachers, to establish curricula and conduct all other educational activities" which are the hallmark of "a well organized civic community."⁴ Implicit here is the idea of a Jewish common school, modelled after the American public school, which rises above sectarian differences and serves, at least in theory, as that institution which provides children of diverse background and outlook with conjoint experiences calculated to create those shared beliefs and behavior which bind them together and distinguish them as Jews. The justification for this approach is based on the assumption that

[i]t makes all the difference in the world as far as influencing the student's character and sense of values is concerned whether education in a way of life represents the will of God, of parents, of a congregation, of a nation or of a combination of some or of all of these authorities . . . The orientation of Jewish peoplehood makes [the] Jewish people as a whole the logical and psychological source of Jewish educational administration.⁵

Communal auspices and conduct of Jewish schools is, in this view, a signal expression of peoplehood which transcends the limitations of congregationalism and other partisan sponsorship.

While the idea of community responsibility for Jewish education is

3. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *The Future of the American Jew* (New York: MacMillan, 1948), p. 114.

4. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *The Religion of Ethical Nationhood* (New York: MacMillan, 1970), p. 171.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 172, 174.

today a commonplace and Bureaus of Jewish Education are a familiar feature of our educational landscape, the vision of a unitary system of Jewish schools under communal auspices has been but rarely realized. The rise to dominance of the congregational school, a development which guaranteed the demise of the communal Talmud Torah, denotes the distance between the predilections of American Jews and Kaplan's blueprint for the organization of Jewish schooling. Kaplan himself said it well when he observed that

the dominant motive in a Jewish congregation is the parents' desire to have their children accept their identification as Jews. For that purpose most American Jewish parents unconsciously live up to a principle which anthropology proves to be universal among all religions. That principle is that the content and spirit of a people's social heritage should be transmitted through the ritual of initiation. In other words, the *raison d'être* of an American Jewish congregation has . . . been the wishes of parents to have their children Bar-Mitzvahed or confirmed.⁶

The logic of Kaplan's construct was similarly unequal to the test forced upon it by contending claimants to sovereignty in education. His review of the circumstances which led to the emasculation of the original conception of the Bureau of the Kehillah identifies the centers of rivalry:

Had not the Kehillah been undermined by the Orthodox rabbinic contingent and had not a new movement offered to provide Jewish education in a more personal fashion and on easier terms than those which a community could offer, the Jewish social and spiritual heritage might have struck deeper roots in the life and character of the Jew and Jewish illiteracy might have been averted. Paradoxical as it may seem, the successful competitor for the function of transmitting the Jewish heritage came to be the synagogue. It was the synagogue that offered to sell Jewish education more cheaply and on easier terms such as standards, hours of attendance and number of years required for graduation.⁷

That analysis, for all its accuracy, unfortunately falls short of explaining the course of its evolution. The specific circumstances which led to the withdrawal of Orthodox support from the Kehillah are far less an important part of that process than their dedication to the idea of the day school, which grew despite the indifference, and even the opposition, of the "official" community. Supporters of the day school were accused of parochialism, ghetto-thinking and, worst of all, behavior which was un-American. If today one out of every four children in Jewish elementary schools attends a day school⁸ that is largely the result of the steadfast adherence of Orthodox Jews to the religious imperative of *talmud-torah* and their setting of a standard for Jewish education which has influenced both Conservative and Reform Judaism.

There is a similar simplification in the view that "Jewish illiteracy" is

6. Ibid., pp. 172-173.

7. Ibid., p. 172.

8. Alvin Schiff, "Jewish Day Schools in America: 1962-1977," *The Pedagogic Reporter* (Fall, 1977): 2-7.

the fault of the synagogue. While it is true, of course, that the limited reach of the synagogue school precludes the development of real Jewish literacy, it is erroneous to maintain that the congregational school alone is responsible for lowered educational standards. The truth is that Jewish educators in America have always been hard pressed in their attempts to stake out a sizeable claim in the territory of pupil time. Schools which required more than ten hours a week of attendance were largely the exception even before the rise of the synagogue and its school to a position of dominance. Even the staunchest supporters of the community school, an institution which, as we have seen, was ideologically independent of the synagogue and which was projected as the paradigm of intensive supplementary Jewish education, doubted the power of that school to attract and hold more than a small minority of Jewish children of school age.⁹

It would appear closer to the mark to view the synagogue and its educational policies not as cause and effect but, rather, as two parallel strands in the same cloth. If, as most commentators agree, membership in a synagogue is less a matter of religious belief and impulse and more a means of Jewish identification compatible with American mores, it seems reasonable to view the congregational school as simply one other point on that same continuum. As Kaplan himself observed, many Jewish parents clearly want their children to retain and maintain some measure of identification with Jews and Judaism, and they look to the school to provide the stuff of which they think Jews are made. At the same time, however, they are unwilling to entrust them to educational settings which cut into the time available for activities considered more central to the development and future of the child and whose teachings are perceived as conflicting with norms of the majority culture which they themselves have so thoroughly assimilated.¹⁰ Whatever the advantages of communal sponsorship of supplementary Jewish schools, and they are many, there is little reason to suppose that it might have proved capable of stemming the erosion of Jewish learning.

There is no little dissonance between the considerable tasks that Kaplan assigns to the Jewish school as he envisioned it and the primacy that he accords to the place of America in the life of the Jew. The curriculum which was designed for the schools affiliated with the Bureau of the Kehillah, a course of study whose religio-national orientation led quite naturally to an emphasis on Hebrew language and literature, history and Bible, and which served as a widely copied pattern, parallels his own thinking about the subject matter of the Jewish school:

The main purpose of all Jewish schools is to stress those values of the Jewish heritage which serve as a bond of unity and brotherhood. These values may be classified as follows: (1) The three thousand year history of Israel; (2)

9. Isaac B. Berkson, *Theories of Americanization* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1920), pp. 104-105, 116-117.

10. David Schoen, "Inside the Classroom: Reflections of a Troubled People," *Jewish Education*, 48:1 (Spring, 1980): 35-41.

Eretz Yisrael as its common and continuous aspiration; (3) a vast literature recording Jewish spiritual life; (4) Hebrew as the original and resurrected vernacular of the Jewish people; (5) the Messianic goal of a warless world united by the will to social justice and ethical nationhood; (6) faith in the spiritual or transcendental meaning of human life; and (7) the Jewish calendar with its Sabbaths and festivals as dedicated to the activation of all the values inherent in the six foregoing items.¹¹

It is difficult to reconcile the expanse of Kaplan's aspirations for the Jewish school with his assertion, repeated in various formulations in all his works, that "... the Jew in America will be first and foremost an American and only secondarily a Jew."¹² While his early opposition to the day school, perhaps the only type of Jewish school capable of creating the level of literacy that he deemed essential to meaningful Jewish life, was rooted in his conception of American democracy, he long resisted joining the ranks of its supporters because he viewed it as "a futile gesture of protest against the necessity of giving to Jewish civilization a position ancillary to the civilization of the majority."¹³ Even his later acknowledgement of the possible importance of an all Jewish school environment carries a measure of careful hedging. A day school is desirable because

[t]he young child . . . should not be exposed to the shock of encounters with manifestations of anti-Semitism . . . But, after he has received his elementary education in an all-day Jewish school, he should be required to attend a *public* high-school, where he can mingle freely with non-Jewish children.¹⁴

Kaplan's commitment to the supplementary Jewish school is a function of his understanding of the nature of a democratic state. Together with other champions of cultural pluralism he claimed the right, even the obligation, of a minority group to perpetuate its culture at the same time as it took its rightful place in the mainstream of American life. According to him, a significant test of democracy in America is the degree to which it "... affords Jews the moral and spiritual security to maintain their attachment to the Jewish people everywhere and to remain loyal to the heritage bequeathed them by their forefathers."¹⁵

That approach, central to the justification of Jewish education in general and to the granting of primacy to the afternoon school in particular, received its most sophisticated elaboration in the work of Isaac B. Berkson, a student of Kaplan's at the Teachers Institute and who, like him, was deeply influenced by John Dewey. There is little to distinguish between Kaplan's view and Berkson's contention that "the plain role of

11. *The Religion of Ethical Nationhood*, p. 174.

12. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization* (New York: MacMillan, 1934), p. 489.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Questions Jews Ask: Reconstructionist Answers* (New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1966), p. 355.

15. Mordecai M. Kaplan, "Matrot Hachinuch Hayehudi B'America" in Zvi Scharfstein, ed., *Y'sodot Hachinuch Hayehudi B'America* (New York: Teachers Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary, 1946), p. 20.

democracy is to strive toward tolerance, to permit the minority group to be active even to the point of exasperation . . . ”¹⁶ in its attempts to guarantee its continued existence. There is, however, a sensible limit, so goes the argument, beyond which a minority group may not go because democracy also demands that

[a]s long as the community contains a variety of forces, all these must be permitted to play upon the child. Otherwise the child is subjected to a process which amounts to indoctrination; his horizon would be limited by a prearranged and delimited and delimiting education, that is by an education parochial in outlook as it is in name.¹⁷

A minority group which views education as a means of preserving its identity must “. . . create a school system complementary to the public schools [and] correlated with them”¹⁸ Parochial education is undemocratic because it

segregates children along lines of creed. The essential element of having the various elements of the population, during the formative period of childhood, associate with their neighbors with whom they are destined to live together as American citizens remains unfulfilled.¹⁹

While it is improbable that a philosophical statement of another cast might have stemmed the tide, it is possible to argue that the position taken by Berkson, and by Kaplan as well, legitimized the ebbing of the ideal of *lamdanut* among American Jews. Their analysis offers a definition of democracy, that is to say, of what America should be, which is to become the standard by which the behavior of Jews is to be determined and judged. Jews who reject that standard are, of course, acting contrary to the best interests of the country in which they live and, by inference, prejudice the continued existence of the group of which they are a part. Judaism, the behavior of Jews, is defined, not in terms of its own normative principles, but, in no small measure, by precepts imposed from without. In pleading the case for the afternoon school they not only refrain from calling attention to the fact that the public school was long dedicated to the obliteration of ethnic and national differences in the name of a Protestant version of Americanization, but they are engaged in the development of a principle which suggests that where the interests of Americanism and Judaism conflict — as is the case when they weigh the advantages and disadvantages of public schools and parochial schools — the interests of the former must take precedence. Whatever the logic and pragmatism of this position, its implications are clear: the Jewish school conceived in this fashion is faced with the impossible task of transmitting a culture whose imperatives and needs are, by definition, subordinate to those of the

16. *Theories of Americanization*, p. 42.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*, p. 172.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 160-161.

larger society. Jewish education, then, is not complementary but really only of secondary importance.

Just as his sense of the press of America on Jewish life led him to a particular conception of the organization, structure and form of Jewish schools, so did it direct Kaplan's thinking about the curriculum for the schooling of a religious minority in a modern, democratic society. His prescriptions for the content of instruction flow from the broad base of his philosophy of Judaism, and though they may be couched in terms of conventional subject matter categories, they are informed by the conviction that

*while Jews cannot do without their tradition, they cannot do with that tradition as it has come down from the past. If tradition is to be a factor in the character training of the young, it must be modified to conform to scientific and rational human experience (italics in original).*²⁰

While Kaplan (at least to my knowledge) never produced a detailed course of study, his observations about the teaching of Bible delineate the principles which ought to guide such an effort:

The teaching of Bible in our time requires . . . a readiness to create a new method of interpretation, a method which will be the reaction of the Jewish people to the hostile social environment of our time . . . [T]hat method must be a conscious effort and a direct response to the present and its demands. . . . The continued existence of the Jewish people and its faith is endangered by three phenomena (1) modern nationalism (2) modern naturalism and (3) the rule of force in the lives of individuals and nations . . . The Jewish teacher must so explain Scripture as to provide pupils with the ability to withstand the onslaughts of these forces . . . The teacher must judge the various books of the Bible not according to their literary value but rather in terms of their usefulness for strengthening the child's feelings of nationalism.²¹

Whatever the subject, its presentation must address itself to the needs and interests of the child.

Despite the generally optimistic tenor of Kaplan's thought, he is less than sanguine about the effectiveness of Jewish education which centers on the child alone. There can be "no serious advance" in the Jewish education of children as long as their schooling takes place in a vacuum. The practical difficulties of transmitting the Jewish tradition — "a social situation [which] is beyond [the] comprehension" of the child, "content [which] does not appeal to his present interest" and the absence of "*educational material adapted for children to help them attain a mature concept of God which meets the challenge of modern thought*" (italics in original) — are exacerbated by the ignorance of Judaism among the parent generation. Meaningful Jewish education for children demands "an extensive movement for the Jewish education of the adult."²²

20. *The Religion of Ethical Nationhood*, p. 182.

21. Mordecai M. Kaplan, "Hora'at Hatanach B'zmanainu" in *Y'sodot Hachinuch Hayehudi B'America*, pp. 60-61.

22. *The Religion of Ethical Nationhood*, pp. 186-187.

The leitmotif of Kaplan's interest in Jewish education is his unwavering concern for the survival of the Jewish people. While group survival in a democracy requires no legitimization beyond the desire of its members to maintain their peculiar identity, Kaplan moves beyond the confines of narrow chauvinism because of his deep belief that the teachings of "Jewish religious civilization" are relevant to the ultimate concerns of mankind. Jewish education is important because the continued existence of the Jewish people, like that of any other group, depends upon a knowledge and appreciation of its traditions. Corporate existence, however, is not an end in itself; the collective is essential to the development of the individual. Jews should be knowledgeable about their tradition not only because it is the medium through which "the child learns to recognize the group which is vitally concerned in his self-fulfillment as a human being"²³ but also because, in addition to its intrinsic worth, that tradition — "as restated in terms of the scientific world outlook" — creates an "awareness of the group [which] transforms the life of the individual from a solitary and purposeless existence" and fosters the development "of ethical and social responsibility."²⁴ Loyalty to one's fellowship and civilization is the avenue to "all institutions that further human civilization and promote human welfare."²⁵

Kaplan's analysis of the symbiotic relationship between the individual and the group, clearly drawn from his reading of Emile Durkheim, acquires an added dimension when he proposes that Jewish education is an important and necessary instrument in the struggle against anti-Semitism. Following Kurt Lewin, Kaplan views education as a critical factor in the forming of an individual whose identification with a discriminated-against minority is strong and positive enough to overcome the feelings of inferiority, fear and even self-hatred which are often the concomitants of membership in low-status groups.

Parents who withhold a Jewish education from their children expose them, without previous preparation, to the shocking experience of rejection by the majority group . . . As a result they are doomed to a life of perpetual inner conflict.²⁶

The Jewish school is the first line of defense against anti-Semitism because the Jew

who cultivates the tradition of his people does not merely inform his mind. He gains for himself an ancestry; he acquires status; he satisfies the need of belonging to a permanent kinship and to be part of a spiritual fellowship.²⁷

* * *

23. Ibid., p. 180.

24. Ibid., p. 179.

25. Ibid., p. 183.

26. *Questions Jews Ask*, pp. 351, 346.

27. Ibid., p. 343.

It is easier to sketch the outlines of Kaplan's thinking about Jewish education than to trace and assess its influence. That is so, first of all, because of the generally difficult problem of drawing a direct line between theory and practice in education. The course that an idea must traverse on its way to application produces so many modifications, both necessary and not, as often to change it beyond recognition. Furthermore, many of Kaplan's notions about Jewish schools are either drawn from, or parallel, the thinking of others and it is, therefore, difficult to determine just who deserves the credit for their introduction into the lexicon of Jewish education. His insistence on the centrality of Hebrew and the importance of identification with Israel surely contributed to the place of those subjects in the curriculum; but Zionist educators who did not necessarily agree with him on other major issues similarly stressed those elements. There is no evidence which indicates that his theology and generally radical approach to tradition received anything more than erratic and spotty attention in the day-to-day work of schools. Neither he nor his followers developed a network of schools which might have provided the locus for the translation of his ideas into the language of the classroom. For all his years at the Seminary, successive curricula designed for the Conservative congregational school — the setting which attracted the majority of his students at the Teachers Institute and the Rabbinical School who pursued careers in the rabbinate and Jewish education — reflect but little of his outlook on the teaching of the classical literature of Judaism and other aspects of the millennial Jewish experience. It would seem that Kaplan's thought impressed itself most strongly upon that first generation of native American Jewish educators who, inspired by his philosophy and touched by the example of his person, established the principle of community responsibility for Jewish education, formed the afternoon school, introduced elements of progressive education into Jewish schools and, perhaps most important of all, gave concrete expression and visible testimony to his belief that Jewish learning was not only compatible with life in America but also capable of contributing to its richness.

Kaplan's Influence on the Jewish Community Center Movement

HERBERT MILLMAN

HISTORIANS OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY Center, tracing its evolution from the inchoate origins in mid-nineteenth century America to the maturation into a world-wide movement, have documented the indelible imprint of Mordecai M. Kaplan on its strivings and even on its name. Notably, Dr. Oscar I. Janowsky and Louis Kraft have recorded the close affinity of the Center movement with Dr. Kaplan's concepts since the earliest decades of this century. Prof. Janowsky, drawing from archival sources in connection with his assignment as director of the watershed JWB Survey in the 1940s, has stated unequivocally that

The ideological foundations of the present-day Jewish Community Center were laid by Mordecai M. Kaplan. As early as 1908, he championed a novel type of Jewish Center which would concern itself with the whole complex of Jewish life in the community and dedicate itself to the service of the entire community.¹

Research by Mr. Kraft, late executive director of JWB and chronicler of the Center movement, affirms that Rabbi Kaplan's ideas and teachings, while addressed to the totality of Jewish life, had particular meaning for Center lay and professional leaders; they provided a purposive frame of reference to an agglomeration of diversely motivated YMHAs and settlement houses; and they gave direction to efforts to establish the Jewish Community Center as an integral unit of the infra-structure of a Jewish community seeking to preserve its Judaic integrity in a non-Jewish milieu.

Historical Background

As described in Kaplan's own recounting of Center history and development, the very term Jewish Center (and later Jewish Community Center) was scarcely known in the vocabulary of Jewish life before 1918.²

1. Dr. Oscar I. Janowsky, *The JWB Survey* (New York: The Dial Press), p. 244. This writer is greatly indebted to Dr. Janowsky for his most helpful resource material, and for his willing sharing of personal recollections and records.

2. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization* (New York: Schocken Press, by arrangement with The Reconstructionist Press, 1967), pp. 51-54.

HERBERT MILLMAN is executive vice-president emeritus of JWB and executive director of the World Confederation of Jewish Community Centers

The predecessor organizations, which emerged indigenously and independent of each other in communities and neighborhoods across the continent from the time of the Civil War, came into being in response to the felt needs of Jewish young people for social, cultural and recreational fellowship. Gradually these institutions began to undertake functions that were not provided by others in the community, and some purposefully incorporated Jewish activities, including the celebration of festivals and lectures or study programs of Jewish substance. Others focussed on expediting the adjustment of the large influx of immigrants to American life by offering classes in English and by vocational training and guidance. In the decades immediately preceding and following World War I, with the marked decrease in Jewish immigration and the emergence of successive generations of native born Jews, a trend began away from individual disparate agency purposes towards the recognition of shared Jewish goals. In the words of Kaplan, "By 1911, a change takes place and we hear faint sounds of an awakening Jewishness in those institutions."³

By then, these organizations had burgeoned in number, size and scope of program. Their leaders found it desirable to meet with their counterparts in other communities and were gradually motivated to form regional federations (the earliest in New England, Pennsylvania and New Jersey). By 1913, they were ready to establish a National Council of Y.M.H.A. and Kindred Societies, which later was merged into the National Jewish Welfare Board.

At the 1920 convention of the National Council, Felix M. Warburg, a leader in the Council, could enunciate the shared ambition of these associations to represent a decided effort in the direction of working with the community as a whole; that through these Centers only can real Jewish unity be attained.⁴

Even if it was only a vision, it reflected the acceptance of community purpose and a readiness by the regional and national coordinating bodies of the fledgling movement to aspire to make the Centers pivotal institutions in sustaining a vital community existence. The seed planted by Dr. Kaplan had begun to establish firm roots.

Dispute Over Purpose

Not all of the lay and professional leaders were in accord on the proposition that the core objective of the movement should be "the furtherance of Jewish life" and "the awakening of Jewish consciousness." Dissenting voices asserted that these aims were contrary to the reasons why people chose to come to the agencies and were, therefore, a gratuitous and unethical imposition. Others sincerely reflected the view that a conscious effort to promote Jewish identification was, in fact, anachronis-

3. Ibid.

4. Proceedings of Council of YMHA and Kindred Associations, Third Biennial Convention, New York, 1920.

tic and a needless barrier to the natural (and, therefore, to them desirable) trend toward the assimilation of Jews into the majority (and, therefore, preferable) culture of the American society. Nor was this opposition a conflict between two clearly identifiable polarizations. Another element was the growing social work professionalization of Center staffs, propelled in the Depression years of the 1930s by the need for skills to help people cope with the economic, social and emotional problems that accompanied the trauma of that era. In those years, Centers were crowded from early morning until the late night closings by the adults who were unemployed and by the confused younger victims of the societal disaster. In all sincerity, many workers questioned the compatibility of a defined sectarian agency position with the responsibility of social workers to clients. The philosophic struggle continued, sometimes bitterly, in ensuing decades in the graduate school classrooms and at workers' conferences, and was nurtured by the intensification of social action interest that was awakened by the civil rights, anti-war and other social confrontations that marked the 1950s and 1960s.

The annals of JWB conventions and the proceedings of the conferences of the Association of Jewish Center Workers from the 1920s through the end of World War II reflect the passion with which the subject of purpose was argued. By then, JWB had become the national umbrella association for several hundred local organizations which resembled each other but were directed towards varied ends. These included the avowedly Jewish YM-YWHAs, neighborhood settlement houses which tended toward the non-sectarian, and a number of synagogue-centers which sought to express Rabbi Kaplan's organic Jewish community, including the religious function.

Throughout this period, his vision of an organic Jewish existence continued to serve as a beacon-light of purpose. He became mentor to lay leaders and staff members of JWB and of Centers and Louis Kraft, who was respected by his colleagues as "the architect of the Center movement," was among the younger ones who gravitated to Rabbi Kaplan when he directed religious activities at the YMHA at 92nd Street in New York in the first decade of the century. Kraft recalled that

Dr. Kaplan was teacher and philosopher, devoting hours, week after week, in discussion and elucidation of his conceptions of the meaning of Judaism in the light of the needs of modern living in America . . . [H]e helped to crystallize a positive outlook on the Jewish future in America; he provided an insight into the potentialities of the YMHA, broadened into the Jewish Community Center, as one of the instrumentalities for Jewish survival.⁵

Similarly, from the earliest days, the lay leaders of JWB and the Jewish Community Center movement turned to Kaplan for inspiration

5. Louis L. Kraft, "Mordecai M. Kaplan's Contribution to the Jewish Center Movement" in *Mordecai M. Kaplan: An Evaluation* (New York: The Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation, Inc., 1952).

and counsel. At a JWB convention in 1935, sensing that internal Jewish societal ambiguities were producing institutional friction between Centers and synagogues, Rabbi Kaplan cautioned that the Center “should not . . . call itself a congregation or rival the synagogue group. But it should *nurture the communal will into an awakening of itself, into an awareness of itself, give the communal will direction and help to implement it.*”⁶ This was, and is, a timely lesson in the importance of institutional clarity of purpose for maintaining organizational cooperation.

Role in JWB Survey

A climactic example of Rabbi Kaplan's direct impact on the generic purposes of the Center movement was his participation in the JWB Survey of 1945–47. This was a conscious effort of classic proportions by a national Jewish organization to give profound reconsideration to a *raison d'être* for its constituency, its ways of work, and its role in fortifying the sense of Jewish community. Kaplan served actively on the Steering Committee of the independent commission appointed by President Frank L. Weil to guide the survey. The Commission was headed by Dr. Salo W. Baron and was composed of distinguished rabbis, scholars and community leaders. It is more than a coincidence that the person who directed the Survey was a student and long-time admirer of Rabbi Kaplan, Dr. Oscar I. Janowsky, professor of history at the College of the City of New York. He recalls vividly and warmly the contribution of Kaplan's wisdom, analytical insights and skill as a mediator to the process of the Survey which led to the reaching of a substantial consensus despite widely divergent personal philosophies. At the meeting of JWB in Pittsburgh, in 1947, Rabbi Kaplan served as the consultant to one of the five committees (the committee on “The Purposes of JWB and the Jewish Center”) which considered the Recommendations submitted by Dr. Janowsky and the Commission. His presence reinforced those who supported the Jewish emphasis of the Recommendations. Thus, his participation contributed to the ultimate adoption by the National Council of JWB of a *Statement of Principles on Jewish Center Purposes*, which established formally the fundamental Jewish communal purpose of the Center. The full significance of the adoption of this Statement of Principles on Center Purposes became apparent in the ensuing years. Centers desiring to maintain JWB affiliation, or who sought it, were required to subscribe to the principles, to incorporate them in their constitutions and by-laws, and to be guided by them in developing policies and programs.

Twenty-five years later, in 1972, an assessment by Dr. Janowsky of the quarter-century impact of the Survey on the Jewish Community Center resulted in two essays, published in the *Reconstructionist*. JWB's reprint of these essays was dedicated to “Mordecai M. Kaplan, who first visualized the potential of the Jewish Community Center for the en-

6. Ibid.

hancement of Jewish Life.” Responding in a private letter to Dr. Janowsky in March 1975, Rabbi Kaplan recalls that “of all my hundreds of students you have been the only one who single-handed performed for Jewish life the indispensable function of social engineering which every Jewish leader should be experienced in.”

Rabbi Kaplan, Social Planner

This compliment to Dr. Janowsky is all the more meaningful, coming from the possessor of a gifted talent in social engineering. Long before social scientists concerned with the stability or instability of all types of complex organizational systems coined the term “open systems theory,”⁷ Rabbi Kaplan made this the essence of his concept of Judaism as a civilization. His stress on Jewish “otherness” rather than “separatism” reflects his pragmatic grasp of the concept that, to remain viable and relevant, the Jewish community and the general society must be viewed as inter-permeative, each influencing the other; that the Jewish community must apply conscious and planful approaches to drawing energy from the external social environment. *Separatism* (a “closed system”), in his words,

results in an ingrown and clannish remoteness which leads to cultural and spiritual stagnation. *Otherness* (an “open system”) thrives best when accompanied by active cooperation and interaction with neighboring cultures and civilizations, and achieves an individuality which is of universal significance.⁸

Kaplan’s application of this concept to the design for Judaism as a civilization provided the frame of reference for many local and national Jewish organizational planning efforts, including JWB and the Jewish Community Center movement. The JWB Survey, and successive studies generated by JWB in the ensuing decades, not only focussed on clarification of purpose but on the sensitive matter of Center relationships with other organizations, including synagogues, federations, schools and national youth-serving organizations. These may never be fully resolved to everyone’s satisfaction, but the guiding principle of *Otherness* has contributed the context for the pursuit of inter-organizational cooperation in giving living expression to Judaism as a civilization.

Impact on Center Programming

In 1951, Dr. Kaplan received the JWB Frank L. Weil Award “for his lofty and creative contribution to the development of an indigenous American Jewish culture.” Further, the citation stated, “From the earliest days of the Jewish Community Center movement and of the National

7. For further explication, readers are referred to Daniel Katz and Robert L. Kahn, *The Social Psychology of Organizations* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1966).

8. *Judaism as a Civilization*, p. 515.

Jewish Welfare Board he has helped to give direction and purpose to the program, philosophy and development of the movement.”

The recognition accorded to him for consciously endowing programming with Jewish purpose is, indeed, acknowledgement of one of the Center movement's greatest debts to him. The Center field heard him clearly when he was among the first to say that educational benefits could accrue from participation in informal recreational pursuits. “Great educators of the world,” he wrote in 1918, “have begun to realize that pastime and recreation are needed not only to build up the body, but also to build up the soul.”⁹ Louis Kraft notes that while Dr. Kaplan addressed these remarks to the concept of the synagogue as an all-inclusive institution,

the practical and enduring contribution in the statement that stimulated the Jewish Community Center movement was the role assigned to the activities of an informal character, (in addressing) the responsibility of Jews towards Israel and towards social problems. . . This conception gave Jewish purpose and Jewish meaning to the activities of the Jewish Community Center.¹⁰

Awareness of the potential of informal activities for education and self-development evoked efforts within the movement to develop methods for richer Jewish programming. These included the application of the emerging techniques of progressive education which then led to the adoption of social group work as a central strand in the training of Center workers. Individuals participating in group activities were encouraged to utilize the experience for their own social and Jewish self-development and to motivate the group as a whole to move to higher levels of Jewish awareness and participation. In recent years, such efforts have been intensified considerably through educational experiences in Israel, the use of Israeli *shlichim* as staff members in Centers and camps, and through the Jewish educational in-service training programs for Center staffs engaged in work with children and youth. Today it is assumed that conferences of health and physical educators, early childhood educators, cultural specialists and workers involved with every age group should focus on the creative enrichment of programming to imbue a sense of Jewish belonging and to convey an appreciation of Judaic values.

Influence on Jewish Communal Professionals

Another important manifestation of Rabbi Kaplan's imprint on Jewish community life in America is his contribution to the development of the professional career of Jewish communal workers. This began, as related above, when Louis Kraft and others gathered around Kaplan at the 92nd Street YMHA in the early years. Kaplan's direct concern with the adequate preparation of communal professionals was heightened when

9. *The American Hebrew* (March 22, 1918).

10. See footnote 5.

11. Oscar I. Janowsky, “A Landmark in the Evolution of Jewish Community Centers,” *The Reconstructionist* (Jan. 21, 1972).

he taught at the Training Bureau for Jewish Social Workers, an early effort to combine Jewish studies with professional training. It was here, he recalls, that "I found myself in a position where I had to correlate the meaning of Judaism with some of the problems of inner conflict with which social workers are called upon to deal."¹²

This interest also was furthered during his involvement with the New York *Kehillah*. In *Judaism as a Civilization* he cites from the 1919 archives of this short-lived experiment:

An increasingly larger number of men and women have become either professionally engaged as Jewish communal workers or have developed an avocational interest in Jewish affairs. Their outlooks and attitudes upon Jewish communal life have become more and more sharply drawn, until today it is possible to distinguish several clearly marked points of view upon Jewish life in America as a whole.¹³

While this concern was addressed substantially to differences among volunteers and to the proposal to create an organizational plan for deliberation and common action, it also identified a need in the emerging Jewish communal profession for a sense of community. This interest remained unabated over the years. Kaplan has been a welcome visiting scholar at conclaves of communal workers and his early disciples and students have become the teachers and mentors of successive generations. During periods of philosophic division on whether social work could be practiced in a sectarian setting, supporters of his views for maintaining an integrated Jewish group existence did prevail.

By the 1950s, consensus on the essentiality of an adequate Jewish knowledge base and of Jewish commitment was reflected in the programs of the annual forums of the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service and the National Association of Jewish Center Workers. The field was ready for a unification of Jewish and professional training. Jewish students in schools of social work readily took advantage of supplementary Jewish background courses provided by JWB. In-service training programs were initiated in Centers, with entire staffs attending weekly Jewish education sessions, where rabbis served as teachers. In New York, the Metropolitan Section of JWB joined with the Board of Jewish Education and the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies in establishing an annual seminar for Jewish communal workers.

In a joint paper delivered in 1962 at the Conference of Jewish Communal Workers, Bertram Gold and Dr. Arnulf Pins presented a formula for the training of Center and other professionals. The competence required of a worker, they said, is "different from and greater than the sum total of social work education, Jewish education and the knowledge of the Jewish Community Center and Jewish communal service. . . . What is needed is a professional person who has integrated the three."

12. *Judaism as a Civilization*, Preface, page xiii.

13. David Sidorsky, ed., *The Future of the American Jewish Community* (New York: Basic Books).

This paper and others that followed presented a concept of a competent Jewish communal worker that was accepted and was directed to supplying an education that integrates the Jewish and the technical components. Four such programs of graduate education are already successfully in effect: The Benjamin B. Hornstein program at Brandeis University; the master's degree curriculum jointly offered by the University of Maryland School of Social Work and Baltimore Hebrew College; the School of Jewish Communal Service, sponsored on the West Coast by the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in collaboration with a school of social work, and at the Wurzweiler School of Social Work of Yeshiva University in New York City.

These efforts were abetted by several actions taken by JWB, the Association of Jewish Center Workers and local Centers and federations. JWB has mounted a highly successful organized effort to recruit and help finance the graduate education of students qualified by high educational achievement, personality and Jewish commitment. The Association of Center Workers, in 1965, adopted a "Statement on Jewish Center Purposes," affirming vigorously their professional commitment to carry out the Jewish community objectives of the Centers, while Federations increasingly support efforts to prepare communal workers both Jewishly and technically.

All of the graduate programs referred to above either require or encourage training experiences in Israel. Much of the Jewish scholarship in the schools is provided by rabbis. Here, too, the example was set by Rabbi Kaplan from the earliest years of striving by Jewish communal workers for a sense of profession. Historians of the Association of Jewish Center Workers note that he was invited to address the first conference in 1918 on the subject, "Religious Work in the Association." Other rabbis over the years have joined Kaplan in helping members of the Association to think through the inter-relationships between the secular and the religious in Jewish life.

Rabbi Kaplan is entitled to full *nachas* as a teacher of Jewish communal professionals. The directors and faculty of the schools claim him as a direct participant through the required readings of his writings and through his willingness to meet with students or to address gatherings. No course on the Jew in American Society or in Contemporary Jewish Thought or in American Jewish History is complete without substantial reference to his views. One director states that he uses Kaplan's teachings "consciously or pre-consciously;" another reports that he is an essential resource in teaching both the theology and sociology of Jewish life.

Mordecai Kaplan has been honored formally in many ways, but no tribute can be greater than the following. One question that is asked of all applicants to one of these schools is, "Which well-known individuals who have lived in this century do you most admire?" Mordecai Kaplan is always in the top ten. An appropriate *minyan* for a remarkable man of the century whose teachings provide a beacon from generation to generation.

Wife of Kohelet

SHLOMIT COHEN

i.

Wife of Kohelet, the fish in the pond are dead.
This is the fountain near the courtyard,
the house drawn from hollow stones,
the smiles hidden in autumn spider webs.
You have taught the bells their inner silence —
a cushioned melody —
Your eyes take in cracks and splinters
of the slanted roof
You are not drunk, nor has your smile crumbled.

ii.

Your husband's grandfather labors over history,
a man of books and a hacking cough.
You count fragments of sky in your fire,
other skies —

iii.

Your elbow at the window, cloistered woman,
you ponder the smell of the street waxing yellow
your shadow falling without choruses of affection
passed over without a glance
Wife of Kohelet, at the window
your eyes burn to see
a dove turn blue
or seem to

(Translated from the Hebrew by Yishai Tobin)

The Best of Both Worlds

JENNY MACHLOWITZ KLEIN

“HAPPY ARE WE! HOW GOODLY IS OUR PORTION, how pleasant our lot, how beautiful our heritage.”

This affirmation is recited daily in the synagogue. To me it has been more than a prayer, more than words mouthed mechanically early in the service. It is a banner that I carry as an American and a Jew. How pleasant is our lot here on American soil, and how beautiful is our Jewish heritage which we are free to enjoy. Indeed happy are we! Happy am I! I, an American and a Jew, live within two civilizations, two cultures, two worlds perhaps far apart, yet I am privileged to share the best of both.

My sister, Hans, of blessed memory, taught me that truth many years ago. (Hans is the name by which my sister was known. We had an Anna and Hannah in our family — Hayah and Honnah — who became Ann and Hans. Hans was Dr. Mordecai M. Kaplan’s personal secretary even long before the Society for the Advancement of Judaism was established, when he was at the Jewish Center on West 86th Street, and she remained with him until the day she died.) She was wiser than I in matters of the spirit, older than I in years and experience.

My husband and I had moved to Montreal where both our sons were born. We had no qualms concerning their status as American citizens, for they were the sons of native-born Americans duly registered at the American Consulate in Montreal. The red sealed documents proclaiming them as Americans were safely stored among our treasured possessions. But that was not sufficient for Hans. Ruvain, my first born, was barely a year old when a package bearing his name arrived at our door. It was from his aunt, and in it were a small American flag and a chocolate hatchet. A letter accompanied that strange gift for a child not likely to be permitted chocolate in those days, at so early an age. “Dear Ruvain,” she wrote in her precise, exquisite handwriting. “This is an American flag for you — and a chocolate hatchet to celebrate George Washington’s birthday. You will love George Washington for he was the first American president and the father of our country.”

Her typed letter to me went into further detail concerning her philosophy of life.

I am not trying to interfere in your lives or to tell you how to bring up your family. About your Jewish customs, I have no concern whatsoever. Ruvain will eat latkes on Chanukah and you will make blintzes for his Shavuot pleasure. That will just reinforce his attachment to Judaism by

JENNY MACHLOWITZ KLEIN *is consultant on adult education for the United Synagogue Commission on Education.*

customs passed down through the ages. But what about his attachment to America? One does not live in a vacuum emotionally. Ruvain can't go around up there in cold Montreal shouting, "I am an American," at the top of his lungs. It will have no meaning for him. But a sweet chocolate hatchet which he will eat and the story of George Washington chopping down the cherry tree and saying to his father, "I cannot tell a lie" — that will remain as one of Ruvain's earliest childhood memories, a reminder of his country while he lives on foreign soil.

She was so right! My Canadian-born sons were, and are, Americans through and through. They remember Montreal with nostalgia, the wide streets, the magnificent churches, the well-laid out parks, even the parade that we watched each year on Saint John the Baptist Day. But, each year, Ruvain takes his whole family to Bristol, Rhode Island, on the Fourth of July, to see the mammoth display of floats commemorating our country's birth and to Roger Williams Park in the evening for fireworks. He also takes them to hear the Megillah read on Purim — and his oldest son to *siyyum bekhorim* on *erev Pesah*.

Strange that I, a child born and brought up during my earliest years on the East Side of Manhattan, could escape the ghetto atmosphere and develop to the point where I would be perfectly at home in another civilization. I might have remained cloistered in my Judaism and never have realized that there was another wider world beckoning. At eleven, my Jewish public school teacher called me a "chauvinist," a word I did not understand then. But I remember answering, "I think I know the streets of Jerusalem, never having been to Palestine (as it was then called), better than I can find my way through the mazes of the Bronx" (to which I had just moved.) Today I realize how much poorer, narrower, less satisfying my life would have been.

I live fully, deeply, meaningfully as a Jew. The two worlds form no dichotomy in the life of my family. Joel, our younger son, recovering from a childhood illness, lay wrapped up on the living room couch, all alone in his recuperation. In the kitchen where I worked I heard his childish voice singing, "My mommy done tole me when I was in knee pants." Without a break, with no pause, with no change of voice he continued, *Ein Keloheyenu*, "There is none like our God." His two worlds. We sat at dinner and slow-eating Joel toyed with his food. "Joel," I admonished. "Imma, this is the Red Sea the Israelites are crossing," he explained as he showed me the path he had made with his fork in the uneaten baked beans on both sides of his plate. Happy am I! How pleasant my lot! How beautiful my inheritance!

One hot summer when I was about sixteen, I registered for a Hebrew course devoted to Samuel Joseph Agnon and given by my beloved teacher, Hillel Bavli. We met in the evenings at the Central Jewish Institute on East 85th Street in Manhattan. Much I may have forgotten that I was taught in my public school, high school or even colleges and universities. Yet strange, how clear in my memory is perhaps every moment of

my Hebrew education, my teachers, their names, their faces, their mannerisms, what they said during sessions. On one particular evening, Bavli was discussing with us the Agnon story *Meḥamat Hamezik* and tried to get an English equivalent for the Aramaic aphorism *braw karaw d'avuhay*. Now Bavli knew English well, but at that moment the exact English rendition of the phrase eluded him. My husband, who at that time was merely a fellow student with me, called out from the back of the room “a chip off the old block.” “Yes,” said Bavli, “A chick of the old flock.”

After class, Bavli and I walked across Central Park, as we did each evening, stopping for an ice cream cone to eat as we went, before going into the subway that would take both of us home to the Bronx. We skirted the lake. For no apparent reason he quoted by heart the “Lake Song” of Jean Starr Untermeyer — as readily as he quoted all of his Hebrew sources without recourse to a written text:

The lapping of lake water
Is like the weeping of women,
The fertile tears of women
That water the dreams of men.

His mellifluous voice reciting in English still rings in my ears. He pointed out the masterful use of the onomatopoeiac force of the letter *l* to imitate the sounds of the water, and the words “water the dreams of men,” “weeping,” “women” so skillfully applying the effect of the letter *w*.

At that moment there might have been no reason apparent to me for the poetry. Looking back, I realize that Bavli was motivated by the teacher in him to lead one of his promising students gently onto paths that would widen her horizons. He knew both worlds. And he knew my family, so deeply rooted in all that was Jewish, living almost exclusively among Jews, emotionally and culturally involved in matters Jewish. Deftly, skillfully, I was being guided into new depths.

How grateful I am to Hillel Bavli; indeed, to all my Hebrew teachers. Leah Klepper, my first teacher, opened up the treasures of Jewish learning when she taught me the *Alef Bet*. But more than that, she became my living model of a teacher — alert, alive, eager to teach, and, most especially for an East Side youngster, a neat, young Jewish woman whose cleanliness sparkled in our drab lives. Mr. Kardimon, quiet, learned, shy, who led a rather rambunctious class of teenage girls through their studies. Once, on *Tu B'Shevat* (then known as *Hamishah Asar B'Shevat*) he liberated us from sessions, quietly admonishing us: “I’m not giving you a day off. I expect you to go into Central Park and walk among the trees — for today is the New Year of the Trees in our Jewish calendar.” We girls giggled, thinking him peculiar and odd. Yet we did walk into the park and we looked at God’s wonders with new insight. Rabbi Moshe Levine, before whose bushy eyebrows we trembled with fear. With what trepidation I approached him weekly to review my written assignment. There were more red pencil markings on the page than there was original Hebrew scrawled

in black. Well do I remember his voice and look as he said: “*Bitti* (my daughter), I’ll speak to you in English.” That phrase “in English” usually spelled doom to his students. He continued: “Do you know you have talent in writing? Develop it.” Those kind, fatherly words despite the dreaded red pencilling! To this day, when I recite Hallel in the synagogue I rejoice at the beauty of the Hebrew, but I remember his insistence that we read the English translation while we studied the Hebrew in order to appreciate the Psalms and their influence on our lives in both these worlds. We all understood Hebrew, to a greater or a lesser degree. The Psalms sang to us in words familiar to our ears and our hearts. But Rabbi Levine was our teacher, our mentor, and we were the children of his spirit. For us he wanted the whole wide world in all the beauty of its sounds.

Today when I hear familiar, famous phrases my whole being vibrates with pleasure. I relish the thoughts; I savor the sounds. I thrill with joy at each word: “It is a wise father that knows his own child.” “It’s a mad world. Mad as Bedlam.” “I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions?” “Say I’m weary, say I’m sad,/ Say that health and wealth have missed me,/ Say I’m growing old but add,/ Jenny kissed me.” (This poem by Leigh Hunt was my own peculiar treasure. I even changed the spelling of my name from Jennie to Jenny after reading it.) “How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.” “Oh, to be in England, now that April’s there.” “Grow old along with me!/ The best is yet to be,/ The last of life, for which the first was made.” “My heart leaps up when I behold,/ A rainbow in the sky.” This is my world’s common heritage. It moves me on paths of sublime wonder.

My other heritage: “Am I my brother’s keeper?” “While the earth remaineth, seed time and harvest, and cold, and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.” “The voice is the voice of Jacob but the hands are the hands of Esau.” “Thy people shall be my people.” “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do justly?” “Thou hast made him but little lower than the angels.” “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.” “A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” “Have we not all one father, hath not one God created us.” “Thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.” “Only to do justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God.” These words have been a guide to my living, a measuring rod to give it proportion.

When the two worlds meet and coalesce, this non-accidental meshing of my two cultures, my two civilizations, finds newer and deeper dimensions. The ear hears, the eye sees, the heart thumps to the beat of yet another drum. Broadway resounds with the echo of such serendipity: *Bury Your Dead* and the heart-warming episode of Abraham burying his Sarah. *The Little Foxes* that spoil the vineyards — brought no spoilage to the White Way. *JB* a modern Book of Job. Even *A Man for All Seasons* seems to derive from Ecclesiastes’ “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” *Fiddler On The Roof* portrayed to native

America the vista of poignant, poverty stricken Jewish life in the *shtetl*. And the *Dybbuk*, appearing on the boards simultaneously in English in one theater and in Hebrew in another. What could be a better proof of two worlds in one, making one perfect whole — the sum of all its parts.

My two worlds meet often! Teachers College, Columbia and the Teachers Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. I remember Professor Bagster-Collins of Teachers College honoring me when he suggested that I demonstrate "the direct method" of teaching a foreign language to his extraordinary class of graduate students gathered from twelve distant countries — Russia, Germany, China, Mexico — men and women of rank in their respective educational systems. I was the only undergraduate among these giants. But, as he remarked to the assembled educators, "She is a product of Prof. Zvi Sharfstein, pedagogue *par excellence* who advocates the *Iuris b'Iuris* Direct Method so successfully employed in the teaching of Hebrew." Zvi Sharfstein of the buoyant spirit, of the lilting intonation, of the high pitched voice, of the God-given skill to make inspired professional Hebrew teachers out of ordinary, run-of-the-mill, average New York young aspirants. I see him today demonstrating the word, "*hayyat*," a tailor. His nimble white fingers moved through the air holding an imaginary needle between thumb and forefinger, as he said in his sing-song imitation of a tailor talking, "Am I a teacher? No, I'm a tailor. I stitch, I sew, I rip, I mend. Am I a teacher? No. A tailor." All this in Hebrew, each word accompanying the action. Who could forget that teacher, the tailor!

So many men led me and others into the paths of two worlds. Dr. William Heard Kilpatrick opened before our eyes a philosophy of education that would influence us tremendously. To a class of some 250 graduate students he showed the art of teaching so that each one felt that he spoke to him personally, directly, intimately, despite the size of the group. Such was his magnetism as a teacher, a mold of men. Dr. Mordecai M. Kaplan, what can I say of him, who made us into modern, human, thinking, rational Jews, who unravelled our tangled webs of jumbled Jewish emotions, who opened wide the gates of these two worlds, whose strength of personality was such that one student even equated him with God. To me, and to thousands of his students, he was, and is, and will remain perhaps the most positive force in our lives as Jews and Americans.

In the Louvre I may stand and marvel as I gaze at the perfection of the statue of Venus de Milo, at the serene mystery of the Mona Lisa. Then I descend the poorly lit stairwell to the sub-basement to an almost completely dark, cold room where a lone guard, wrapped in a winter overcoat, sits besides the Moabite Stone. I see the stone, the black basalt slab, no more than three feet high. This is the reality. But before me there is Dr. Leo Honor, Registrar of the Teachers Institute, our handsomest teacher, with a shock of shiny black hair, dancing eyes, warm understanding smile,

and I hear his voice, “Mesha, king of Moab.” Leo Honor’s excitement roused our interest. Here was past history come to life for us that day. He was a teacher of teachers, a friend, willing to listen to our simplest request — who once said: “If ten students ask for a certain course which is not given at the Teachers Institute, we will try to arrange for it;” who bought a book for twelve dollars, an enormous, extravagant gesture in those days, and justified the purchase to us with, “I know that no one of you will ever read this book. But whenever a classroom window is opened by you in a Hebrew School anywhere in these United States, that action will more than pay for this book.” The book — a large volume on whose spine, boldly emblazoned in gold, was the title, VENTILATION by E.L. Thorndike. Now I realize that I have written and spoken of these, my beloved teachers never adding *z’l*, *zikhronam l’vrakhah* of blessed memory. I meant no disrespect. Quite the contrary! These men are so alive, so vital, so much a part of the very fiber of my soul, that I cannot think of them as having gone to their eternal reward. For the omission, theirs is the forgiveness.

Because of them my two worlds exist. I can sit on the greensward of Stratford in Connecticut, eating a picnic supper out of my basket before show time, and listen with emotional pleasure to the madrigal singers. Just the music to make me at one with *Henry V*, to be performed that evening. No less impressive to my ears is the play in concert form, *Ish Hasid Hayah* in a Broadway theater, and a young Israeli declaiming, “Abba, — such a small flame and no more!” Abba, his father, was beaten to death before his eyes during a pogrom back there in Europe.

The aesthetic experience of a Messiah Sing is hard to match. I must confess that I possess no voice, cannot read music, may not even be able to hold a tune correctly. But when Brown University in my home town, Providence, announces the Messiah Sing I rush to a library, get a score of the oratorio, attend the public Sing, and my voice rings out with, “For unto us a son is born,” “And his name shall be Wonderful,” “Halleluyah” — loud and clear. The music may be Handel’s but the words are mine — out of the Bible. Gounod may have written the music, but the words were those of Ruth, “Entreat me not to leave thee.” All these give meaning to the glorious sound in my two worlds. *Ashreinu* — Happy are we!

Perek (Ethics of the Fathers) teaches us: “Four are the characteristics among those who sit in the presence of the Sages. The sponge, the funnel, the strainer and the sieve.” I pray that I am the sponge which absorbs everything! I hand this sponge over to my two sons (also to the thousands of my colleagues in the field of Jewish education). Squeeze this sponge — let that which flows from it lead you in the path of two worlds. Absorb it in turn and you will see that it is good!

Modern Zionism – An Historic Perspective

SAMUEL SCHAFLER

IS MODERN ZIONISM THE FULFILLMENT OF traditional Jewish Messianism or is modern Zionism “a Copernican Revolution” in Jewish life, to use Arthur Hertzberg’s phrase?¹ That is the fundamental question of Zionist historiography.

We know that Jewish tradition and Jewish texts are permeated with an ineradicable love of Zion and that a yearning to return to Erez Yisrael is a continuing thread in the tapestry of Jewish life. Hundreds of Biblical verses and rabbinic texts amply demonstrate that love of Zion is an indelible, integral and indispensable dimension of classical Judaism. Not to feel an emotional tug, a tropism towards Jerusalem and the Holy Land, is to be less-than-loyal to normative Judaism. Wherever he stood, the heart of the Jew was oriented towards his beloved Erez Yisrael. Facing Yerushalayim in prayer, reciting Psalms, lamenting on Tisha B’av, celebrating Tu B’Shevat in the cold of the European winter are dramatic exercises in the unique amalgam of piety and stubbornness that we call Jewish faith. But Biblical quotations, prayer and fasting do not add up to Zionism.

The *Tillim* Zoggers are still saying *Tillim* in Williamsburg and Borough Park and the *Yeshiva Bohrim* in Lakewood and Gateshead see little or no connection between their yearnings and modern Zionism. If Zionism were simply a matter of remembering and *zoggen Tillim*, there would be no State of Israel today. Abraham Joshua Heschel, who loved prayer, also wrote: “Mourning, love and longing do not build a land.”

The truth is simple and surprising: the men of faith were prepared to pray and wait. Modern Zionism was built by men and women who refused to pray and who were unwilling to wait any longer.

Gerson Cohen aptly described the traditional yearnings for Erez Yisrael as “the religious capital upon which Israel drew.”² But that capital did not suffice to build a state.

True, there were always Jews in the past who refused to wait and wished to make the prayer *L’Shanah Ha’ba’ah B’Yerushalayim* an immediate reality. But they were exceptions: lonely dreamers, mystic mavericks who were often denounced by the rabbinic leaders of their day for their

1. Arthur Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea*, p. 18.

2. Gerson D. Cohen, “The Meaning of Israel in the Perspective of History,” *Atid Curricula Judaica*, (New York. n.d.), p. 6. An expanded version of this address appears in *Conservative Judaism* vol. 27, No. 3 (Spring, 1973).

SAMUEL SCHAFLER is a rabbi, currently serving as superintendent of the Board of Jewish Education of Metropolitan Chicago.

impatience in prematurely pushing for the “end.” *D’hikat Ha’kez*, they called it disapprovingly, and they warned that the Lord could not, and would not, be pushed. Such vaunted forerunners of modern Zionism as Rabbi Yehudah Alkalai and Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer were not the rabbinic leaders of their day and they would have been long forgotten if Zionism had not succeeded.

In rabbinic Biblical exegesis, the “dry bones” of Ezekiel’s vision were the bones of the Israelites who died in the desert because they refused to wait to enter the Promised Land until the Lord was ready to redeem His promise. The tragedy of Sabbatai Zevi, the false Messiah, was held up as an object lesson for those who would not piously, patiently and passively wait for the end.

It is, therefore, not an exaggeration to say that it was not traditional Jewish religion that created modern Zionism but its opposite. It was the decline of traditional rabbinic Judaism and the abandonment of its teachings and its style by large numbers of Jews in the nineteenth century that led to Zionism. Throughout the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century, aside from the handful of resolute rabbis who created the Miz-rachi, Jewish Orthodoxy remained bitterly anti-Zionist.

Zionism may have been created by Jews in revolt against rabbinic Judaism, Jews who refused to wait for God to solve the Jewish problem, but these Jews had Jewish roots, deep Jewish roots. They, who were determined to go against the grain of the Jewish tradition, paradoxically ended up fulfilling the traditional Jewish dream of *Shivat Zion*. The radicals and revolutionaries who were the founders and builders of modern Zionism were determined to break the icons of the Jewish past, to slaughter the sacred cows of Jewish tradition; they succeeded because, almost unwittingly, they tapped the underground lava flow of Jewish yearning for redemption from the burdens of *galut* and for return to Zion. Through the strange calculus of Providence, Zionism, the modernist movement of revolt, became the heir of the passions of Jewish messianism.

Because of this external resemblance, it is easy for the casual student of Zionism to make a quick and misleading identification of Zionism as simply traditional Jewish messianism in modern form, with the resurgence of nationalism in the nineteenth century providing the motivation.³

But it is crucial to peer below surface similarities. The *geulah*, the redemption, that Zionism promised is wholly other than the promise of

3. Gershom Scholem’s letter, in 1929, to Yehuda Burla, the Hebrew novelist, is illuminating in this connection: “I absolutely deny that Zionism is a messianic movement. . . . The redemption of the Jewish people, which as a Zionist I desire, is in no way identical with the religious redemption I hope for in the future. . . . The Zionist idea is one thing and the messianic ideal another and the two do not meet except in the pompous phraseology of mass rallies which often infuse our youth with a spirit of new Sabbatianism which must inevitably fail. The Zionist movement has nothing in common with Sabbatianism.” See David Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter History*, p. 177.

geulah in a traditional context.

In the traditional view, *galut*, exile, is a divine punishment for Israel's sins. When the price for those sins has been fully paid, a rapprochement will take place between the God of Israel and His people and Israel will be allowed to return to its Land. Redemption is, essentially, a religious-historical drama played on a cosmic stage.

In Zionist thought, however, *galut* is not a punishment for sin but a tragedy of history which Jews can repair if they will it strongly enough. "If you will it, it will not remain a fable." Return to the Land has nothing to do with atonement. It is a matter of Herzl dealing, not with God, but with the *goyim*. Jews need to return to a land of their own, not to return to God.

The Zionist fathers — Hess, Herzl, Weizmann — were not propelled by classical Jewish piety. They were not interested in bringing the Messiah. They were interested in using the dynamics of modern nationalism to find a non-miraculous, non-messianic resolution to the Jewish problem. For the East European Zionists — Berdichevsky and Brenner, Bialik and A.D. Gordon, Berl Katznelson and Ben Gurion — Zionism was a revolt against the rabbinate and against Jewish passivity; a revolt against the economy of *luftmenschen*, of petty traders surviving by swapping paper profits rather than by building and creating; a revolt against *galut* and *galutiyut*, which is the sum of those less-than-admirable traits which Jews have acquired in *galut*, from obsequiousness to apologetics. And, like all revolts, it was an explosion of anger and bitterness against the Jewish establishment, against the Jewish tradition, against Jewish history — an explosion whose effects are still evident in Israeli education and Israeli attitudes towards religion.

The chrysalis, the historical context in which Herzlian Zionism emerged, is crucial here. Modern Zionism emerges from the failure of the Emancipation to fulfill its presumed promise to both sides of the "bargain."⁴

The *goyim* felt aggrieved because they had assumed that, once the Jews had been emancipated and granted full legal and civic equality, the Jews would voluntarily give up their distinctiveness as Jews. Many liberals of the nineteenth century felt it was inconceivable that modern, emancipated citizens should wish to remain Jews and continue to subject themselves to rabbinic dogma and Talmudic casuistry. Once the pressure of Christian persecution, the force which had caused Jews to huddle together, was gone, Jews would joyously agree to become absorbed into the people among whom they lived. Even those Christians who would have

4. It is significant that Howard M. Sachar commences his massive *A History of Israel: From the Rise of Zionism to Our Time* with the story of the Napoleonic Sanhedrin (p. 3). This is a symbolic way of depicting Zionism as a repudiation of the Napoleonic Sanhedrin's rejection of Jewish nationhood and a refusal to restrict the definition to the Christian categories of church and cult. The Zionist struggle to redefine the Jewish people in national terms won a decisive victory with the issuance of the Balfour Declaration, which marks the first official recognition by a Great Power of the Jewish people as a nation. See Isaiah Friedman, *The Question of Palestine, 1914–1918*, pp. 309–332, particularly pp. 324–325.

agreed that the disappearance of the Jew *qua* Jew was not a condition of the “deal” called Emancipation, were disappointed that, in spite of the remarkably successful surface adaption of Jews into the linguistic and cultural world of the nations among whom they lived, Jewish solidarity across national boundaries did not seem to diminish. Jews continued to feel and act as if they were members of one people — even when they were loudly proclaiming that Berlin was their Jerusalem. In addition, removing the barriers to Jewish economic activity did not make them into productive farmers and artisans. They continued to deal with money rather than to work with their hands. Jews remained Jews and stubbornly clung to their clannish and capitalistic ways. In sum, the Emancipation, which had been seen as an opportunity for Jews finally to be like everybody else, was a failure.

Many Jews in the West felt equally aggrieved. Solemnly, at Napoleon’s Sanhedrin in 1807, Rabbis and Jewish notables had declared that Jews were no longer a nation in exile. Jews had fought and bled and died for their new fatherland; Jews had trimmed their beards and their rituals. But their fellow citizens still did not accept them as equals. No matter how patriotic Jews were, no matter how thoroughly they had divested themselves of their traditional Jewishness, they remained victims of prejudice and discrimination. They were still second-class citizens *de facto*, even where their *de jure* status gave them equality.

Thus, for many on both sides, Emancipation was the deal that failed. While the majority of Jews in the West still retained their faith in the dream and their hope that, in time, the promise of Emancipation would be fulfilled, others felt bitterly cheated.

The radical Gentile response to the failure of Emancipation was the growth of anti-Semitism, a new form of Jew-hatred based not on the superstitions of religion but upon the “facts” of scientific biology and history. Post-Christian in spirit and, therefore, not eradicable even by baptism, the new anti-Semitism was dedicated to rolling-back the Emancipation of the Jews. Basing themselves on a racial view of history, anti-Semites were concerned with the consequences of Jewish assimilation: the more German and the more French the Jew, the less visible the Jew, the more dangerous he became. The Jew had to be prevented from being absorbed into the bloodstream of European nations lest these nations succumb to the cancerous virus of the Jew.⁵

The radical Jewish response to the failure of Emancipation is Zionism. Many of the most militant early Zionists were German Jews who had experienced little or no Judaism in their homes but who had found that, no matter how complete their assimilation, the doors of university fraternities and university appointments remained closed to them.⁶ For

5. George L. Mosse’s recent study, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism*, is the best historical summary of this depressing subject.

6. Ismar Schorsch, *Jewish Reactions to German Anti-Semitism, 1870–1914* and Stephen M. Poppel, *Zionism in Germany 1897–1933*, pp. 21–32.

them, "Zionism was . . . the Jewish final solution to 'the Jewish Question.'"⁷

For Herzl and his fellow Western Zionists, Zionism was the only hope for Jewish survival. Since Jewish religion, Jewish language and Jewish culture held little meaning or attraction for them, Zionism became Judaism for them, the traditional component of their Judaism having already largely withered away. In sum, for many post-emancipation Western Jews, Zionism was the road back to the Jewish people and to Jewish culture. It provided them with a Jewish identity, an aspect of Zionism which is crucial in the history of the Zionist idea in America.

Herzl may have been less-than-learned in the nuances of Jewish tradition and Jewish history, but he had the unerring instinct for the essential problem that is the special gift of the great. Inspired more by the nationalist renaissance of the Greeks and the Hungarians, the Italians and Balkan peoples, than by Jewish history, Herzl wrote in *The Jewish State*:

I consider the Jewish Question neither a social nor a religious one, whether or not it might adopt such a coloration. It is a national question and in order to solve it, we must first of all make it into a political world question, one to be settled in the councils of the civilized peoples.⁸

Herzl saw anti-Semitism not simply as the irrational and unjustified rejection of the Jew; just as Zionism was the natural Jewish response to the failure of Emancipation, so was anti-Semitism the understandable response of the Gentile. Herzl felt that he "understood" anti-Semites. He felt that it was in the self-interest of the political leaders of the West to assist Zionism because it would free their states from the internal conflict and unrest which anti-Semitism engenders and which can damage the very fabric of the State, as France had experienced in the turmoil of the Dreyfus trials.

Herzl did not turn his back on Western culture in disappointment or bitterness; his was not a counsel of despair. On the contrary, his Zionism was permeated with confidence, even optimism, that the rationality and reasonableness of Zionism would evoke the voluntary assistance even of anti-Semites. As he wrote in his preface to *The Jewish State*: "The Jewish State is essential to the world; it will therefore be created."⁹ Essentially, Herzl trusted *goyim* and saw Zionism as an opportunity finally to break the chain of hatred between Jew and Gentile. The society that he wished to build, in whatever corner of the world would be chosen as the locale of the Jewish State, was to be Western European in its culture and rhythm. If the Gentile, because of his historic hatreds and economic conflicts, would not, or could not, allow Jews to participate as full equals in European civilization, Jews would build their own Jewish version. Wherever it would be, however, it would be an offshoot and an outpost of European civilization.

7. Cohen, *Op. cit.*, p. 7.

8. Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State*, (Scopus Publishing Co. of N.Y., 1943) p. 20.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

Herzl's Zionism is, thus, not an attempt to flee the West, but an attempt by Jews to become part of Western history *as Jews*.

Hertzberg's formulation is both vivid and accurate:

(P)aradox of paradoxes . . . (Zionism is) one of the great acts of faith that was produced by the nineteenth century; as an offer on the part of the Jew to assure the peace of Western society by abandoning it for a state of his own, it is the ultimate sacrifice on the altar of his love for the modern world.¹⁰

Sephardic Zionism is vastly different in tone and thrust from West European Zionism because Sephardic and Oriental Jewry, except for the handful of *haute* Sephardim in England, Holland and the United States, had not grappled with the trauma of Emancipation. The Zionist resurgence among Sephardic and Oriental Jewry at the beginning of the twentieth century owes much more to classic messianism than does Ashkenazic Zionism. As Gerson Cohen has shown, Sephardic Messianism has a much more activist tradition than Ashkenazic Messianism. The latter has tended to emphasize the virtues of pious passivity and the heroism of martyrdom and *Kiddush Ha'Shem*, while the former produced a series of messianic pretenders.¹¹

Let us now turn to the world of Eastern Europe. Jewry there was Zionist *before* the emergence of the Zionist movement in Western Europe. Many of the early Zionist settlements in Palestine date from the 1880s before Herzl burst on the Jewish world scene. They were the products of the Zionist awakening of the *Hovevei Zion* and the *Bilu*, who comprised the first *Aliyah*. Eastern European Jewry was a people in search of a leader who could articulate its yearnings and shape its masses into a movement. That was Herzl's task and that was the secret of his success. The basic fact about Eastern European Jewry is that in the Russian Pale of Settlement the Jews actually lived as a nation. In the towns, villages and *shtetlakh* of Eastern Europe, Jews had all the attributes of nationhood. In most communities in the Pale they far outnumbered the *goyim*; they lived by their own laws, traditions and rhythms; they spoke their own language. They were, of course, subjects of the Tsar — but so were the other nationalities of the Russian Empire.

In contrast, Western European Jews lived in isolated small communities within a non-Jewish world, clustering around the synagogue, speaking the language of the Gentiles, with a distinct economic profile. Hess and Herzl evolved a theory of Jewish nationalism for a state that would somewhere, someday, be theirs. In Eastern Europe, however, Zionism was not a theory but a description of the Jewish way of life. Although politically powerless and poverty stricken, the Jews of Eastern Europe were more "normal" than their Western brothers, to use the language of nineteenth century economics. In Eastern Europe, Jews were

10. Hertzberg, *Op. cit.* p. 57.

11. Gerson D. Cohen, "Messianic Postures of Askhenazim and Sephardim", *Leo Baeck Institute Memorial Lecture #9*, 1965.

not only bankers and money lenders, old clothes dealers and peddlers, they were loggers and teamsters; they were farmers, water-carriers and boatmen. They were a people enslaved by a people, not a cult or a church.

Modern Zionism emerges from the marriage of East European inchoate nationalism with the charismatic leadership of Theodor Herzl. The fateful *shiddukh* took place when Herzl, rebuffed by Baron de Hirsch and the Rothschilds, turned to the masses and organized the Zionist Congress as the Jewish Parliament, a Parliament-in-exile. Thereby, he became the first Jewish statesman of modern times, not a *shtadlan* and not a *schnorrer* but a statesman, a leader who represented the will of a people. When Herzl visited Baron de Hirsch in Paris on June 2, 1895, in an attempt to enlist the Baron's support, he bluntly said: "[Y]ou breed beggars. As long as Jews are passive recipients of charitable funds they will remain weaklings and cowards."¹² For Herzl, here was another goal of Zionism: to breed men, not beggars. That is part of the Zionist revolution in Jewish life.

Western European Zionists supplied the theory, the organizational know-how, the political "savvy" that infused the masses of East Europe with new hope. Herzl provided new dignity to Eastern European Jewry because he showed them that, in spite of the emancipation and the freedom of Western Jews, in spite of their success and their professions, the Jews of the West shared the situation of their East European brothers and sisters. A common need called Zionism united them both. This was Herzl's central thesis: "We are a *people: one people*."¹³

Because the Jews of Eastern Europe lived in the Pale as a people, the changes that took place within Russian Jewry in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries did not take the form of religious reform, as happened in Western Europe. East European Jewry either shook off religion and demanded a secular Jewish nation, or they adopted radical Marxist solutions to their plight, or they emigrated to America and the other Western nations that would accept them. Perez Smolenskin and other intellectuals of the *Haskalah* fought against a Jewish modernity cut off from its Jewish roots and, through the revival of the Hebrew language, they labored to cultivate a renewed sense of national pride. Others worked to develop the more folkish Yiddish language as the expression of Jewish culture, a Yiddishism that emerged as Dubnow's Diaspora Nationalism, which was Zionism without Zion.

The eruption of the Tsarist pogroms in the 1880s shattered the dream of Jewish liberals and assimilationists in Russia that they, too, would receive, in due course, the full freedoms of civic and political equality that Emancipation had provided to Western Jewry. With the

12. Sachar, *Op. cit.* p. 36.

13. Herzl, *Op. cit.* p. 20. How central this thesis is to modern Zionism is illustrated by Ben Halpern's insistence that, to this day, "What makes us Zionists is the doctrine that the Jews throughout the world are one people." See his *The American Jew: A Zionist Analysis*, p. 90.

pogroms and the May Laws of 1882, the bubble of optimism had burst. That is why the East European Zionism of Pinsker and Aḥad Ha'am is so profoundly different in spirit from the world of Western Zionism.

Pinsker and Aḥad Ha'am are pessimists. They simply do not trust *goyim*. They have no faith in princes. For Pinsker, anti-Semitism is an endemic, ineradicable plague, while for Aḥad Ha'am, Jewish conflict with Christianity is inevitable. Jewish alone-ness is not remediable. There is an eternal antagonism between the People of the Book and the People of the Sword. Western Jews who hide themselves from these elemental facts of Jewish life are, to use Aḥad Ha'am's indelible phrase, spiritually "slaves in the midst of freedom." Jews can never be a normal people; that is not our destiny. Even a Jewish state in Palestine would not normalize us, Aḥad Ha'am insisted, since "the geographical position of Palestine and its religious importance for all the world would make it impossible for us to maintain the status of a normal small state."¹⁴

The austere and cerebral Aḥad Ha'am was an elitist. The pen-name that Asher Ginzberg chose, Aḥad Ha'am, usually translated as "one of the people" does not mean that at all.

The Hebrew phrase "*aḥad ha'am*" is found in the Bible, Genesis 26:10. There we find Abimelekh rebuking Isaac, who had misled him into thinking that Rebecca was not his wife, in these words: "See what you have done to us. One of the people (*aḥad ha'am*) might have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us."

To this, Rashi comments that *aḥad* here does not mean "one" but, rather, it means singular or singled-out. Thus, *aḥad ha'am*, Rashi explains, refers to "the one who is singled-out from the people, that is the king."

Asher Ginzberg was too learned and profound a scholar of Hebrew texts and literature for us to assume he was not aware of this comment by Rashi. When he chose Aḥad Ha'am as his pen-name it was with full knowledge that learned Jews would understand it in the light of Rashi's comment.

Aḥad Ha'am's elitism is underscored by his attempt to develop a semi-secret elite society called Bnai Moshe, which was to be the instrument to fulfill his vision of Zionism: the spiritual and cultural revitalization of the Jewish people. This is in sharp contrast to Herzl's deliberate creation of the Zionist Congress as the voice of the masses.

These differences in personality and style, in tone and temperament, between Herzl and Aḥad Ha'am, shaped and colored their vision of Zionist goals. It helps us to understand why Aḥad Ha'am refused to attend the First Zionist Congress in 1897 as a delegate. He was there in Basle — but he deliberately came as an observer, not as a delegate. Sitting there, observing the euphoric excitement of the delegates, made him feel like "a mourner at a wedding." And those are Aḥad Ha'am's own words!

For Herzl, Zionism was the movement that would save the en-

14. Hertzberg, *Loc. cit.*

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